

May Jesus Christ Be Praised Newsletter

January 1, 2017



Breaking Open the Word

JANUARY 1, 2017 Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God Lectionary: 18 Gospel LK 2:16-21

Spiritual Reflection: We hear that the shepherds returned after seeing the child in a manger “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.” Sadly, many of us see the same Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament at Mass but we do not return home “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.” Instead many spend their time complaining about what they had heard: a bad homily, Church’s teaching that they disagree with, etc. and what they had seen: a hypocrite old lady, a person sitting in their pew spot, a holy than thou type person, etc. What if this year instead of complaining about our faith we took the time to “ponder” it in our hearts like Mary did and see if we cannot discover some greater meaning?

Spiritual Questions

1. What was some of the things that the shepherds could have complained about?
2. Why do you think the shepherds did not complain?
3. What do you think Mary and Joseph were thinking when these guests arrived?
4. What was one thing you remember from last week’s Mass?
5. When was the last time that you spend some time outside of Mass learning about the Mass?



PRAYER OF THE WEEK

New Year’s Prayer

God our Father,
on this Feast of Mary, the Mother of God give us an appreciation of the many gift You have given us during the past year. Help us bless You in return during the coming year by sharing some of our gifts with others who have far, far less than we do. Amen.



Spiritual Ponderings:

January 1st

As we begin a new year, I would like to share a reflection with you that I wrote last year during a time of prayer and titled “Where is the Faith?” I hope that it will inspire you to appreciate and take your Catholic faith a little more serious this year.

I truly believe that Saint Louis is one of the greatest cities in the United States to live. I often talk about “Saint Louis being the biggest small town and the smallest big town.” Saint Louis is big enough to have professional sports team like the Saint Louis Cardinals and Blues but we are small enough that our traffic is not as bad as the larger cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, or Atlanta.

Growing up in Saint Louis it was almost impossible not to be a Saint Louis Cardinal Fan. There is a special relationship between the Cardinals and the city. Opening day is almost considered a holiday and almost every school has a “Cardinals Day” where they encourage their students and teachers to wear their Cardinal fan gears.

Personally, growing up I loved watching the Cardinals with my grandmother and mom on the television. My grandmother loved listening to Jack Buck and Mike Shannon on the radio while watching the television on mute. As a young adult, I enjoyed going to Cardinals game with friends and family. I also believe that it safe to say that at any St. Louis Cardinal game in St. Louis, you could find at least five priests at the game. About the time, I was transferring from my first parish to my second parish, I began to realize that my devotion to the St. Louis Cardinals had begun to falter. I had stopped going to Cardinal games and I could not tell you where the Cardinals were in the standings. My lack of interest in the Cardinals had nothing to do with any incident that had upset me or their playing but rather small choices that I had made almost without knowing it.

At the end of one of his parable’s concerning prayer, Jesus ends with the question “when the Son of Man comes will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). There are sometimes after reading the local newspaper or watching the new, I wonder the same thing. How is it that there are so many people falling away from God? It is my firm belief that many people are wandering away from their Catholic faith in the same way that I lost my Cardinal Fandom, one small, almost unnoticeable, choice at a time.

The good news is that once we notice these small choices, we can address them and rebuild our faith life like I did with my love for the St. Louis Cardinals. Here are ten choices that I am going to try to correct this year as I try to grow in my faith.

1. Practicing Paganism instead of Living a Life of Grace

I believe most people, at least subconsciously, fall into the habit of practicing paganism instead of living their faith life in the light of what Jesus reveals to us about God.

The main idea behind paganism was that there were supreme beings that had different powers to control different aspects of nature. Human beings worshipped and offered sacrifices to these gods or goddesses in order to appease them or keep in a good mood. If the gods or goddesses were in a good mood they might if they felt like it looks favorably upon a person and bless them but if they were in a bad mood they might curse you. For example, the story of Odysseus in the Greek myth *The Odyssey* is punished by Athena for not offering to her a sacrifice of thanksgiving and the story of Homer's *Iliad* was about a great war in which different gods and goddesses took sides depending upon who worshipped them.

One of the great things Jesus reveals to us is that God was not like the pagan gods and goddesses that people had known up until that time. Jesus reveals to us that the Father's favor and love did not have to be earned because God freely bestowed it to people who believed in Him. All we had to do was receive it or remain in it by not sinning. This was also the center of the great conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish Authorities. The Jewish Authorities thought that they had to practice their faith and perform their rituals with as few errors as possible because they did not want to anger God. This is part of the reason why they limited the number of people who could practice their faith. They were trying to hide these "unclean" people from God in order not to have God mad at them. Jesus revealed to them and to us that it is not perfectly forming rituals but rather love that matters. It was not about excluding people but rather about including people.

I discover a lot of people today stop practicing their faith simply because they feel that they have messed up too much or are simply not capable of making God happy. This is sad because ultimately our God is not like the pagan gods and goddesses. He is more like the kind and loving father in the story of the prodigal son, the good shepherd in search of his lost sheep, and the sower who gives generously to the good and the bad.

Catholic Trivia

Last Week's Trivia Question & Answer

Name 3 ways in which the following Christmas Decoration talk about our faith.

1. Jesus became one of us
2. Jesus demonstrates humility
3. Jesus is in feed trough as bread of life.
4. Jesus is light of the world



mThis Week's Trivia Questions

Which of the four do not belong?

1. Pope - Holy Father - Bishop of Rome - Magisterium
2. Ordinary – Bishop – Administrator - Pontiff
3. Christ – August – Messiah - Anointed



Catholic Humor

Jesus, Moses, and an old man go golfing. The first one to tee off is Moses. He smashes the ball and it is heading right for the water hazard before the green. Moses raises his club, the water parts, and the ball makes it to the green. Jesus gets up to swing, cranks it out, and it is headed for the water hazard. Jesus closes his eyes and prays. The ball skips across the water and lands on the green two feet from the hole. The old man's turn comes and he drives the ball. The ball looks like it is going to drop directly into the water. A fish jumps from the water hazard swallowing the ball, as an eagle drops from the sky, grabbing the fish. As the eagle flies over the green, a bolt of lightning strikes the eagle, making it drop the fish. As the fish hits the green, it spits out the ball and the ball falls into the hole, making a hole in one. Jesus looks at Moses and says, "I really think I'm leaving Dad at home next time!"



Quote(s) of the Week

"Teach us to give and not count the cost." - St. Ignatius de Loyola

"The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?" - Dorothy Day

"To convert somebody go and take them by the hand and guide them." - St. Thomas Aquinas