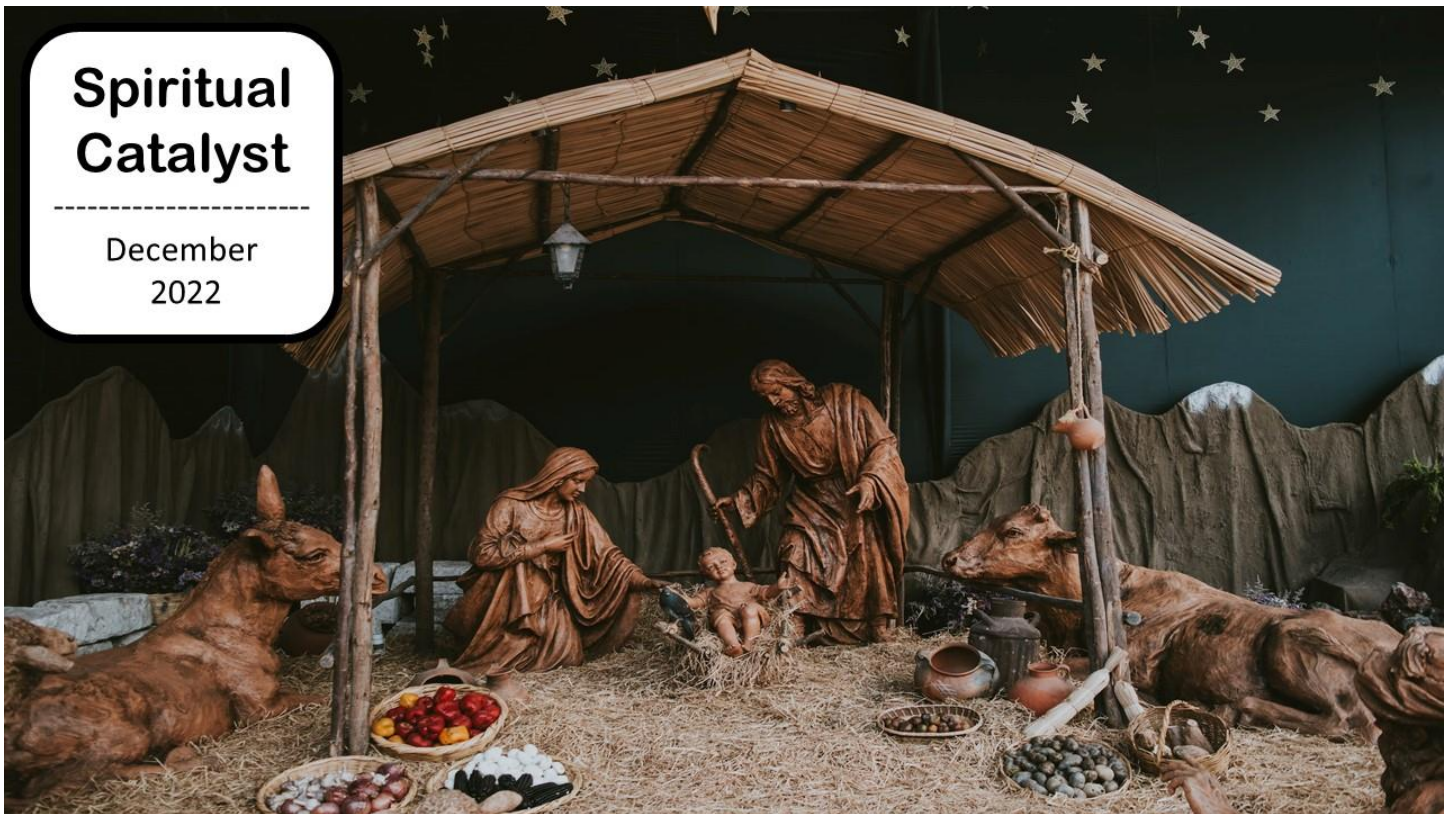


# Spiritual Catalyst

December  
2022



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The following quote from Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen inspired me close to twenty years ago to start my Spiritual Ponderings bulletin column: "There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate The Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be." Over the years many different people have told me that it has helped them grow closer to the Lord. I hope that you find in this Spiritual Catalyst information that will help you come to understand what the Catholic Church teaches and why. I hope by reading this, the Lord will draw you closer to Him. Please be assured of my prayers on your spiritual journey.

Thank you and God bless,  
Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

## BREAKING OPEN THE WORD



**"Ignorance of Scripture is  
ignorance of Christ" – St. Jerome**

**December 4, 2022**

**A - Second Sunday of Advent**

**Lectionary: 4**

**Gospel MT 3:1-12**

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: *A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.* John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to

flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."



**Spiritual Reflection:** Spiritual writer and scripture scholar Aiden Tozer wrote: "Repentance isn't only sorrow for past sins, it's also a determination to now do the will of God as He reveals it to us." John instructs the Pharisees and Scribes that just being baptized will not be enough. They also need to reform their ways.

#### **Spiritual Questions:**

1. John believed in his mission so much that people noticed that he was different from others (for example his clothing was similar to that of Elijah). When people examine your life, can they see that your faith means a lot to you.
2. What are some of the good spiritual fruits that you produce?
3. How can you help others produce good fruits?
4. What are some ways that you are different from non-Christians?
5. Ask someone about your baptism.

**December 11, 2022**

**A - Third Sunday of Advent**

**Lectionary: 7**

#### **Gospel MT 11:2-11**

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the

wind. Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing. Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.* Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."



**Spiritual Reflection:** Our Gospel implies that John the Baptist is a man of integrity. He is not a "reed swayed by the wind." Martin Luther King Jr. wrote "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

#### **Spiritual Questions:**

1. What does it mean to be a person of integrity?
2. Are you a person of integrity?
3. What stops you from being a person of integrity?
4. How did John the Baptist model integrity?
5. Do you take offense at the Gospel?

**December 18, 2022**

**A - Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Lectionary: 10**

#### **Gospel MT 1:18-24**

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.



**Spiritual Reflection:** The following is part of a song titled "God is with us" by Casting Crowns. "Love is raining down on the world tonight + There's a presence here I can tell + God is in us, God is for us, God is with us, Emmanuel + He's the Savior we have been praying for + In our humble hearts He will dwell + God is in us, God is for us, God is with us, Emmanuel + I feel compelled to tell all who will listen + That peace on earth is not so out of reach + If we can find grace, mercy and forgiveness + He has come to save, He is all of these." Realizing that God is present compels the singer to "tell all who would listen."

**Spiritual Questions:**

1. What does it mean to you when we say God is Emmanuel "God with us?"
2. Does realizing God is present make you want to do anything differently?
3. How humble are you?
4. Where do you find peace?
5. Do you believe God is with us? For us?

**December 25, 2022**

**The Nativity of the Lord - At the Vigil Mass**

**Lectionary: 13**

**Gospel MT 1:1-25**

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of

Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. Thus, the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations. Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."* When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

**The Nativity of the Lord –Mass During the Night**

**Lectionary: 14**

**Gospel LK 2:1-14**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So, all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of

great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

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### **The Nativity of the Lord - Mass at Dawn**

#### **Lectionary: 15**

#### **Gospel LK 2:15-20**

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So, they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

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### **The Nativity of the Lord - Mass During the Day**

#### **Lectionary: 16**

#### **Gospel JN 1:1-18**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become

children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.



Spiritual Reflection: There are some Christmas songs that contain no message of Christ for example Frosty the Snowman or Rudolph. While I like singing them (and watching the cartoons inspired by them) they were not meant to bring me closer to Christ. Will your celebration of the holiday bring people closer to Christ?

#### **Spiritual Questions**

1. Do you put Christ in Christmas?
2. Are you happier having Christ in Christmas?
3. How are you going to love the people in our life?
4. How are people going to leave your presence today? Filled with more hope, peace, and love?
5. How will you let this Christmas change you forever?





## The truth is like a lion; you don't have to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself. - Saint Augustine

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 6, 2023

Spiritual Ponderings

Why am I still Catholic?

In the First Letter of St. Peter, Christians are challenged: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope (1 Peter: 3:15)." After my introduction and with this Scripture Passage in mind, I feel the need to give you the reader some insights into why I am still Catholic. I am therefore this month, going to share with you ten reasons why I am still Catholic.

### 1. Reasonableness

There was once a man who had a very serious problem that was ruining his life. It was also very embarrassing and so the man did not want to tell others about it. Not knowing where else to go, he decided to ask his parish priest for help. The man went up to his parish priest and explained his problem. The man was unable to sleep at night because he had an irrational fear that there were monsters living under his bed. The man explained to the priest that he knew that this fear was illogical, foolish, and irrational. He also explained how embarrassed he was that he could not get over this childish fear. The priest was a little surprised by the man's problem, but he wanted to be helpful and compassionate, and so he suggested that the man should pray one Hail Mary each night before he went to bed and this is what the man agreed to do.

When the man returned the following week, it was easy to see that he was still deeply troubled at night by his irrational fear of having monsters under his bed. The priest, still wanting to help the man, then instructed him to pray a decade of the rosary (Ten Hail Mary's) each night before he went to bed. The man agreed to do so and left.

When he came back the third week, he was still having nightmares and so the priest told him to pray a full rosary (fifty Hail Mary's) each night before he went to bed and once again the man agreed to do so.

The next time the man saw the priest he was fully rested and had gotten over his problem. He no longer had the childish fear that there were monsters under his bed. The priest looks at the man with a smile on his face and said, "I see that praying the full rosary work."

The man politely told the priest that he was well rested, but his peaceful nights though did not come from following the priest's advice. Instead, the man explained that he began to sleep peacefully after telling his neighbor about his problem. The man's neighbor was an engineer and so he came over to the man's house and sawed the legs of the man's bed. You see there cannot be monsters under the bed if there is no under the bed.

I love this story because it reminds me of a story that someone once told me about the famous Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton. According to this story, G. K. Chesterton found himself in a room full of famous authors and in this room, there was a person asking each author "If they were stuck on a deserted island and could have one book with them, what would that book be?"

One of the authors in the room quickly stated that he would want to have the Bible with him. Another writer said he would want to have a book that contains the complete works of Shakespeare in it. Finally, the person asking the question came to Chesterton and asked him the question. Chesterton supposedly quickly responded to the question with what would have been his days' equivalent to "Ship Building for Dummies."

The story about Chesterton is one of my favorites because it speaks to me about one of the main reasons why I love the Catholic faith. There is an earthiness, a realism, a practical-ness to the things that Catholic do. Catholics do not just sit around a pray for a miracle when faced with a challenge. Yes, we pray for the miracle but then we feel inspired by God to go out with His grace to make the miracle happen.

Growing up, I encountered many people who tried to convince me that faith and reason were incompatible and that they could not exist side by side with each other. There were many people who wanted me to believe that I could substitute the word "superstition" for the word "faith." These people feel that a religious person had to surrender his or her way of thinking in order to be a person of faith. I have discovered the opposite to be true. I have come to believe that the opposite is actually true. Those who claim that faith and religion and science cannot work together seem to ignore so much.

As I began to study history (I double majored in Philosophy and History) in college, I soon discovered that

faith and reason can exist together. I was really surprised to learn that the Big Bang Theory was actually developed by a Belgium Catholic Priest named Father Georges Lemaitre. I was equally surprised to discover at a trivia night that the Vatican sponsors its own Space Observatory called Mount Graham near Safford, Arizona.

In my studies, I have discovered that the Catholic Church has nothing to fear from science because we believe that the God who created the Universe (the one we worship) is not some petty super mortal like one of the Greek or Roman gods but rather is a being that is totally beyond the universe. He is also a rational God who is motivated out of love and not out of a desire to entertain Himself.

It was also in the seminary that I began to admit that I had a problem with depression. When the formation team in the seminary began to challenge me to face my depression head on, I honestly did not have much hope that anything in my life would change. I had been to many individual and family counselors in the past and nothing ever seemed to change. The counselors that the seminarian connected me up with and learning about prayer and other things helped me really overcome my depression and learn to deal with it in a healthy way. I could see a connection between many things the counselors were asking me to do, with the wisdom of the saints, and the teachings of Jesus. Where I expected people to just tell me to “offer it up” and “get over it” I discovered the opportunity to move from just surviving life to thriving. For example, I learned about Positive Sentiment Override. Positive Sentiment Override is the psychological principle that says the more positive thoughts you have about something or someone the more you will tolerate its or their negative traits. Many of the Saints have spoken through the centuries about the power of gratitude for example: “No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.” - St. Ambrose or *“Jesus does not demand great action from us but simply surrender and gratitude.”* – St. Therese of Lisieux

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**November 13, 2023**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Why am I still Catholic?**

Here are some more reasons, why I am still Catholic.

## **2. Faith and Action**

Carl Marx, the founder of communism, called “religion the opium of the masses.” He believed that religion inspired people, especially the poor, to simply accept things as they are. I wondered if Carl Marx ever really knew a Catholic or had ever really studied the history

of the world. The Catholic Faith is in no way a drug that encourages people to accept the status quo. It is rather a force that motivates Catholics to think beyond themselves and to change the world.

At one time, the Roman Empire was a place filled with much evil. For example, the Romans practiced infanticide. When a child reached the age of eight days, he or she would be presented to his or her father. If the father literally turned his back on the child, the child would be tossed out into an alley to die of exposure. This great evil eventually disappeared from the Roman Empire because of the Catholic Church’s teachings on the value of life.

According to some historians, the city of Rome at one time had more slaves living in it than free people. Eventually slavery also disappeared from the Roman Empire because of the Catholic Church’s teaching of love for one’s enemies and that all people were made in the divine image.

One last example, at one time the Roman Empire was filled with gladiatorial games where men were forced to fight against wild animals or worse each other in order to survive and sadly this was also considered some crude form of entertainment. These games too were eventually banished because of Catholic moral teaching.

The Catholic Faith has inspired countless people throughout the ages to make the world a better place. Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, and Damian Molokai are just a few saints who spent their life making the world a better place and, in the process, they inspired countless others to follow their example.

An honest look at the daily life of any Catholic Parish reveals quickly that the Catholic Church is not designed for those who do not want to get involved. Every parish provides its parishioners with hundreds of opportunities to volunteer and make their world a better place, for example serving the poor through the Saint Vincent DePaul Society, teaching children how to play sports through the Athletic Association, inspiring children through the religious education program, going on mission trips, and frying fish for fish fries, are just a few of the many activities Catholics are encouraged to get involved in. Catholic Relief Services is the largest international aid service in the world today.

## **3. Holy Men and Women**

In 1999, I was blest to be one of the altar servers at an Evening Prayer Service presided over by Saint Pope John Paul II when St. John Paul II came to my home city of St. Louis. As part of the ceremony, I was blest to hold the Holy Water to Pope John Paul II as he blest the front doors of the Cathedral. It was a truly an amazing experience to be standing next to this extraordinary man. I do not have

words to describe the experience. John Paul II had been one of my spiritual heroes in the seminary, not so much because he was the pope, but because he was a man of hope despite all that he had endured in his life. He lost his mother and father when he was young and had to suffer under Nazis and Communist control of his country. I could see a mysterious joy radiating from him despite also being able to see the sufferings he had endured and was enduring in his body as he suffered from Parkinson's disease.

Meeting Saint John Paul II was an amazing and awe-inspiring event. In addition to meeting Saint John Paul II, I have also met many ordinary people in my life that are living extraordinary lives of holiness. I have come to believe that these people are living saints. For example, I have met a retired school principal who could have spent his retirement relaxing at home in his favorite recliner but instead he answered God's call for him to get up and serve the poor of the world in a very concrete way. This man now travels to Haiti, Uganda, and Colombia to build orphanages, dig wells, visit prisoners, and feed the hungry. He is constantly inviting others to come with him on mission and he does it all of this with a smile on his face and without any monetary compensation. When I was growing up, I was blessed to know an "old Church lady" who went to daily Mass and after Mass would dutifully and devoutly pray the Stations of the Cross. I always wondered if she was a mystic because when I would ask her to pray for me because I had a problem, the problem would miraculously disappear. Her life of prayer was truly inspiring. One last example, I am blest to know a woman who when she was a teenager had an abortion. After receiving God's mercy and being reconciled with the Church, she dedicated her life to help other women receive God's forgiveness through Project Rachel and has become an outstanding advocate for the Pro-Life movement. These holy people and many more people with similar stories plus the stories of the saints inspire me to be a person of faith.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**November 20, 2023**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Why am I still Catholic?**

Here are reasons 4, 5, and 6 of why I am still Catholic.

#### **4. Magnificence of Creation**

I have read a few scientific articles about how scientists are using the term "Goldilocks Zone" when talking about the position of the earth away from the sun. They say if the earth was any closer to the sun it would be

too hot for life and if it was any further away the earth would be too cold to support life. The earth happens to be in "Just right" position for life to exist and I do not see how educated people can say this without a divine architect. I believe that I have a better chance at dumping a box of Legos out onto the ground and having them come together to form the picture on the box without any additional help than a universe this complicated result from a "big bang" without there being some divine creating force to guide it.

As I marvel at the mysteries of the universe and come to believe in a divine creator, I also find myself just as amazed when I look inward and at the complicated way in which things come together. As I learn about things like cells, molecules, blood vessels, etc. I am once again convinced that the universe is not the result of a chance but rather is a part of some divine artist's work.

#### **5. The Longevity of the Church**

I can remember, as a kid, that I at one time only had four television channels to choose from. Streaming services have revolutionized the way that I view television. When I am trying to choose a show to invest my time in, I often check to see how many seasons the show has been on. The more seasons the better. I also try to discover if the show has ended and if the show has ended, I like to know whether or not people were happy with how the show wrapped up. There are some shows that I have heard had one or two good seasons but ultimately ended very disappointingly and so therefore I chose to watch another show. I think there is something similar that goes on in my choice of religion.

Supposedly at one point in history Napoleon was conversing with a cardinal of the Catholic Church and in the midst of the conversation Napoleon informed the cardinal that he had planned to destroy the Church and the cardinal famously replied: "Your majesty, we, the clergy, have done our best to destroy the church for the last 18,000 years. We have not succeeded, and therefore neither will you."

There were many organizations and nations in the world that have been built with the intent of existing forever and eventually though they seem to come to an end and fade away. The Egyptian Empires that build the pyramids are ancient history, Alexander the Great and his Greek Empire is now only found in movies and history books, and the mighty Roman Empire that once conquered the known world fell into ruins. Even today St. John Paul II and the power of the rosary is given a lot of credit for the fall of the former Soviet Union. The Church founded by mostly uneducated fisherman still exists today thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church has been through a tremendous number of scandals over the years and been attacked by many who were once considered

some of its greatest members and yet still survives in the present.

It is my believe that there is no human way possible that the Catholic Church could have existed for two-thousand years if it had not been protected and guided by a divine being. From the moment of her conception until now, the Church has been under attack by those who wish to destroy her and yet she remains. Nations, institutions, etc. have come and gone but the Church has continued to remain.

## **6. Be the Best version of yourself as possible!**

The Catholic Church makes it very clear that there is no competition between God and creation. God in no way benefits from keeping us down. In fact, God desires the opposite – to raise us up. St. Irenaeus of Lyon stated in his writings: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” I do not think that I could worship a God who wanted to keep me down and not allow me to reach my full potential.

The great Renaissance painter Michelangelo is quoted as saying: “The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high, and we miss it, but that it is too low, and we reach it.” The Catholic Church always encourages her members to grow. We are never finished on this earth.

Some forms of Christianity believe in a concept called “predestination.” Predestination is the religious doctrine that from the beginning of time God destined you as a person to go to either heaven or hell and it does not really matter how you live in this life. If God wants you in heaven, then you will make it to heaven even if you are an axe murderer. The Catholic Church teaches us that how we live our life on earth (being open to God’s grace) will go a long way in determining where we will spend eternity.

The Catholic Church stresses that each person has the gift of free will and that God gives each one of us the power to choose our own eternal destiny now.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**November 27, 2023**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Why am I still Catholic?**

Here are reasons 7 & 8.

## **7. How the Church handles the Problem of Evil**

One of the biggest problems I ran into growing up in my faith life was the problem of evil. How could an all loving, all powerful, and all-knowing God allow evil to exist? How could an all-loving God allow my sister to die when she was four and I was only two? How could an all-powerful God not intervene and force the people of the world to work together and put an end to war and

poverty? How could an all-knowing God allow terrorist attacks like September 11<sup>th</sup> take place?

The problem of evil therefore is a question that any serious religion must address. There are some religions that simply proclaim that God can do what He wants because He is God. This has never set well with me because this makes me think of God as a tyrant imposing His will upon us. I believe that I would rather revolt against such a God than worship Him.

There are some religions and philosophies that simply say that our world is broken, and God is just doing the best that He can but this makes me think of a god who is either weak or stupid or at least blind to human suffering and I do not think that I want to worship a god like that either.

The Catholic Church, through the writings of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and many more wise and holy people, teaches that evil is best understood as deprivation/absence of the good and God allows this absence because He respects our free will. God respects our free will because He desires us to know what it is like to love and to be loved and for love to be real, a person must choose to give it and to receive it. A consequence of having free will means we have to have the ability to choose between two things. When a person chooses the lesser of the two goods this results in a lack of good in the world and so therefore evil enters the world.

My faith teaches me therefore that God does not will evil for the sake of allowing evil to exist. God does not will cancer for example. Cancer is a result of evil in the world like a headache can be the result of dehydration. If I drink the right amount of water, then I would not get headaches. In the same way if everyone in the world did all the good that they could, there would be no evil in the world. Sadly, though we all know that human beings are imperfect and therefore our sins create chaos in the world which is manifested in things like war and cancer.

Another way, I look at it is to say that God does not stand up in heaven waiting to pluck us out of this world whenever He wants us but rather God is standing there ready to catch us when this world tosses us out.

In recent years, I have been blessed to watch my brothers and sisters become parents and I have come to see that part of being a good parent means allowing a child to fail so that the child can not only learn from his or her failures but also so that they can learn that they are still loved by their parents (if their parents are good parents) even when they make a mistake. In a similar way God does not want us to fail but He allows us to fail so that we can learn from our mistakes. Ultimately though, I trust that God does this because in the end, He knows that He can bring about a greater good and will make everything work out.



## 8. Willingness to Stand for the Truth

Abraham Lincoln is one of my favorite spiritual people, who was not known for his spirituality. I love the following quote: "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

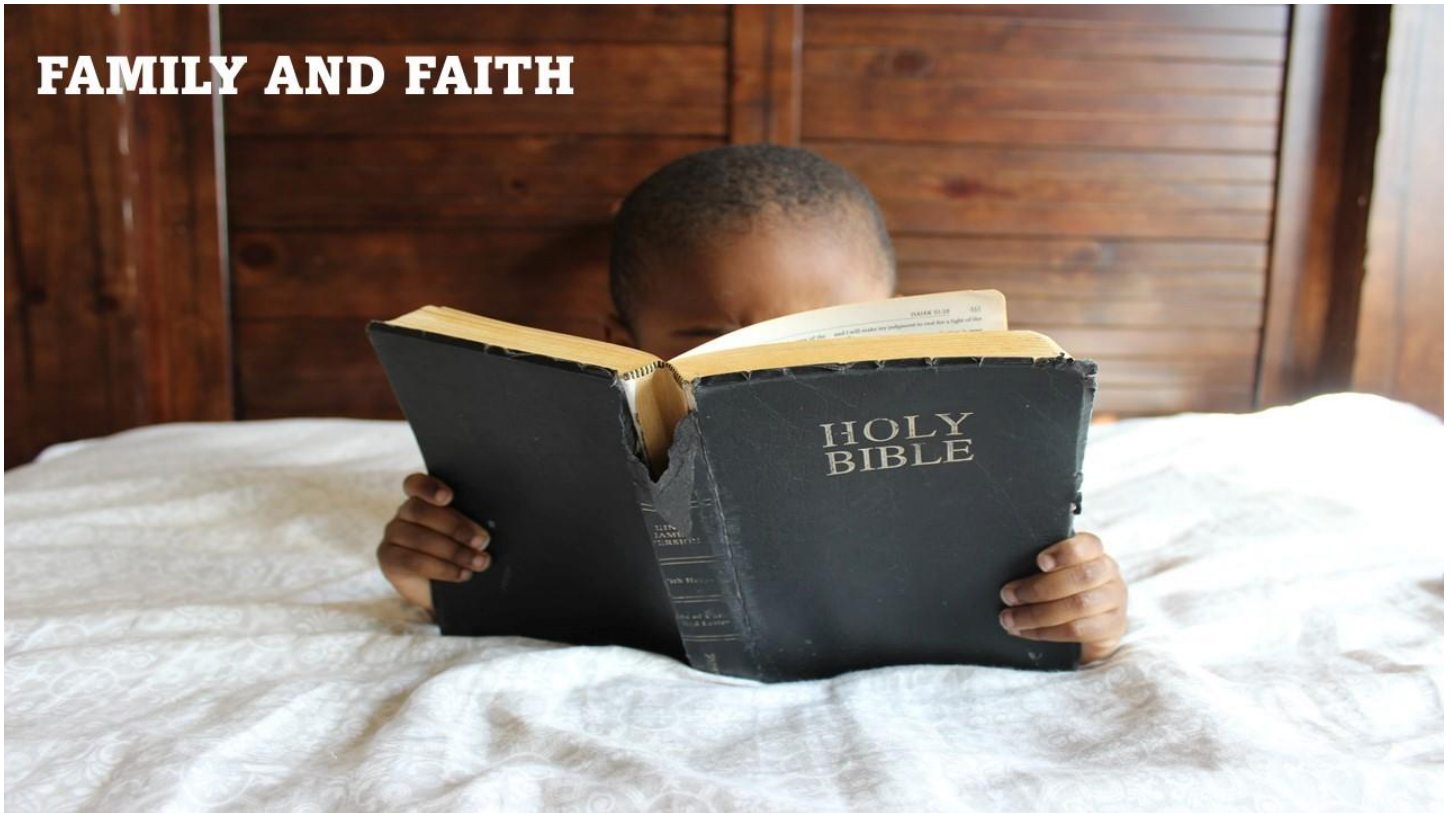
I came across the following quote from St. Toribio that speaks to this point: "Christ said, 'I am the Truth'; he did not say 'I am the custom.'" As a child who was constantly being picked on by other children, I learned to appreciate that other people's opinion did not define reality. I think this also made me appreciate those who

stand up for the truth all the more and even her enemies have to admit that the Catholic Church stands up for her beliefs.

I have heard it said that "the truth is the one thing that cannot be imitated for the moment it is it is no longer the truth." Throughout the Church's history the Church has held onto her teachings even though they are not always popular to non-Christians and/or accepted by some of her members.

As a side note, I think that it is important for the Catholic Church not to simply glaze over problems for the sake of making people happy because issues then are never really dealt with.

## FAMILY AND FAITH



**To maintain a joyful family requires much from both the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to become, in a special way, the servant of the others. - Pope John Paul II**

## Advent Ideas for Family

From [acatholicmomslife.com/5-advent-activities-for-children](http://acatholicmomslife.com/5-advent-activities-for-children)

**The Giving Manger.** Every time your child does something kind for another person, they can put a

piece of straw into baby Jesus' manger. The more good deeds and straw that goes in the manger, the softer the bed for baby Jesus. This is a great interactive activity that helps kids to understand that we prepare for Jesus' coming during advent. You can either buy or make a giving manger. The parts you will need are the manger, straw, and baby Jesus. Growing up, my parents made their own out of cardboard and paint and we used yellow yarn for the straw.



**Joseph and Mary Search.** Rather than do “Elf on the Shelf,” we will hide either St. Nicholas or Joseph and Mary. Last year I hid St. Nicholas, but this year I will be hiding Joseph and Mary. Starting in advent, I will hide Joseph and Mary throughout the house each night and then each morning the kids will try to be the first to spot them. They loved this last year and felt so cool when they were the one who found St. Nicholas. I love that hiding Joseph and Mary throughout the house will be able to help the kids visualize Joseph and Mary’s journey to Bethlehem and their arrival at the manger on Christmas Eve.



**Brother Francis: “Days of Advent.”** The movie starts by explaining what advent is. Then each day there is a 3-to-4-minute video that explains a little about faith and gives the kids a prayer to say. I love Brother Francis videos, and this is a sweet, short way for children to learn the faith each day during advent.



### Saint Nicholas Day

St. Nicholas of Myra is a major saint in many European and Eastern countries, and one of the old Christian traditions surrounding his feast day is for kids to leave their shoes out overnight in front of the fireplace, on the windowsill, or outside their bedroom door so that St. Nicholas can fill them with special fruits, candies, and other small gifts and treats.

This tradition grew from the story of when St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra, threw bags of dowry money, either through a window or down a chimney, into the home of an impoverished family to rescue their daughters from being sold into slavery. This was just one of his many acts of goodwill and charity towards the poor, especially poor children.



While Catholics in America aren't as big on celebrating this feast day with their children, more and more American Catholic families are adopting St. Nicholas Day as a special Advent family tradition



Ideas to include in your children's shoes are bags of chocolate candy coins, a small toy, new socks, a tangerine, and inexpensive religious items, such as a Christmas ornament, a rosary, saint bracelet, and prayer cards.

Another cute part of this tradition is for kids to leave carrots or hay in their shoes overnight for St. Nicholas' donkey to eat. St. Nicholas takes the hay and carrots for his donkey and replaces them with small gifts and treats for the children in the morning.

Yes . . . St. Nicholas was known to ride a donkey laden with gifts for children before he graduated to flying reindeer!

St. Nicholas with his donkey carrying gifts for children. St. Therese of Lisieux describes this tradition in her home in France as a small child and recounts how much she loved it. However, for her family this happened not on St. Nicholas Day but on Christmas Eve (similar to our American tradition of hanging the stockings by the fireplace).

*"I knew that when we reached home after Midnight Mass I should find my shoes in the chimney-corner, filled with presents, just as when I was a little child . . . Papa, too, liked to watch my enjoyment and hear my cries of delight at each fresh surprise that came from the magic shoes, and his pleasure added to mine." ~ St. Therese of Lisieux, Story of a Soul*

St. Nicholas' feast day traditions vary widely from country to country, but they all carry the same theme of small gifts and treats left in either shoes or stockings. Continuing this Advent tradition in your own home is a great way to teach your children to venerate the saints and to deepen their knowledge of and love for the Christian faith.

#### BLESSING OF THE CANDY CANES ON ST. NICHOLAS DAY



The prayer below is a beautiful reflection of Catholic faith.

#### St. Nicholas Day Candy Cane Blessing Prayer

Good St. Nicholas, we honor you  
on this your holy feast day.  
We rejoice that you are the patron saint  
and the holy symbol of joy  
for many peoples of many lands.  
Come, great-hearted saint,  
and be our patron and companion  
as we, once again, prepare our homes and hearts  
for the great feast of Christmas,  
the birth of the Eternal Blessing, Jesus Christ.  
May these sweets, these candy canes,  
be a sign of Advent joy for us.  
May these candy canes,  
shaped just like your Bishop's staff,  
be for us a sign of your benevolent care.  
We rejoice that you are the holy bringer of gifts  
and that so many have been delighted  
through your great generosity.  
Help us to be as generous of heart.  
Wherever these candy canes are hung,  
on tree or wall or door,  
may they carry with them  
the bright blessing of God.  
May all who shall taste them  
experience the joy of God  
upon their tongues and in their hearts.  
We ask God, now, to bless  
these your brightly striped sweets  
in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### Crafts for Our Lady of Guadalupe and St Juan Diego

By Dianna Kennedy 3 Comments

Website: <https://thekennedyadventures.com/crafts-for-our-lady-of-guadalupe-and-st-juan-diego/>

As a Catholic mother, I love telling my children the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St Juan Diego. I had lots of fun gathering ideas for crafts to help us celebrate these wonderful feast days. Ready to have some fun celebrating with crafts for Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego?

#### St Juan Diego's Tilma Craft

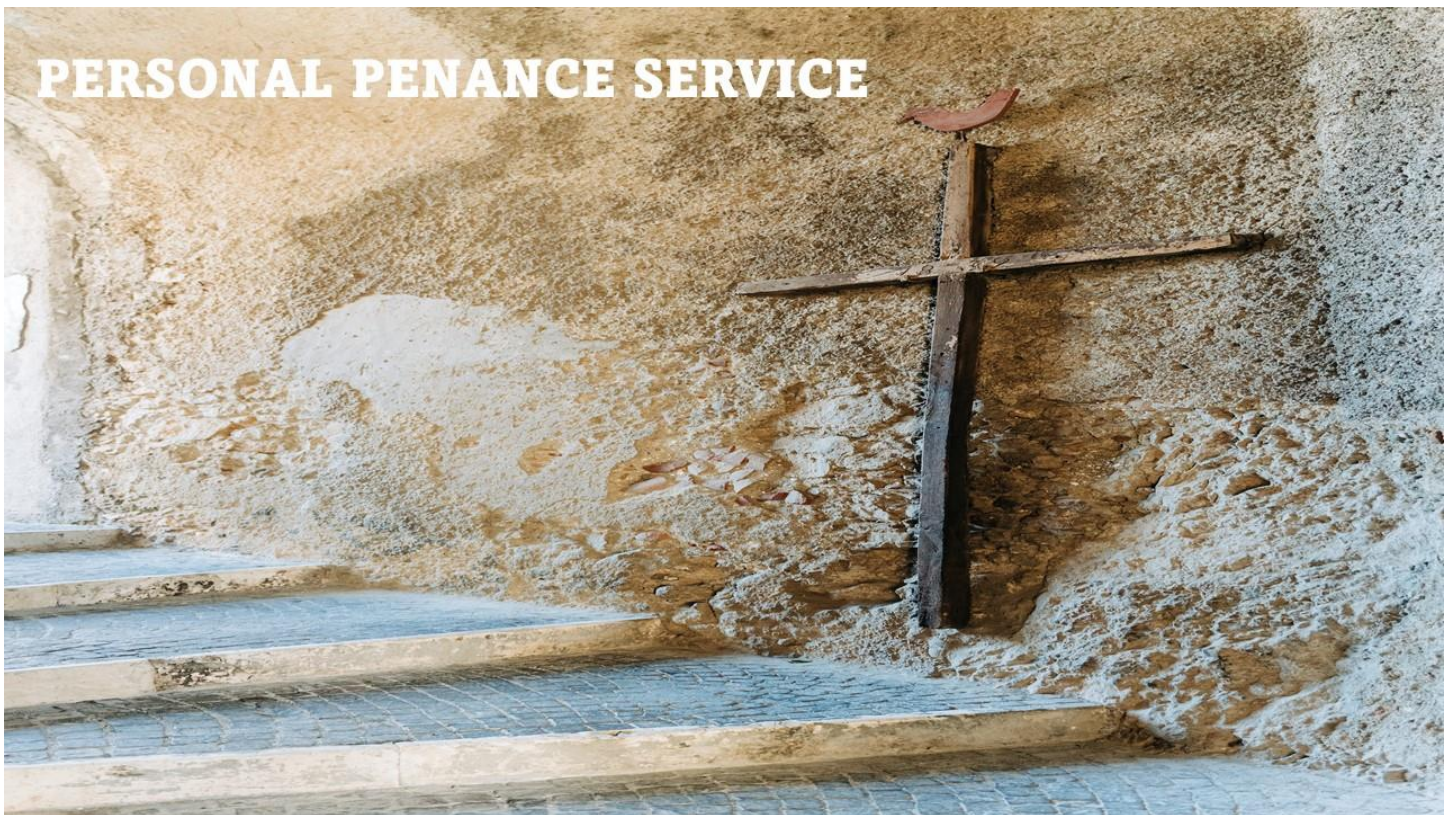
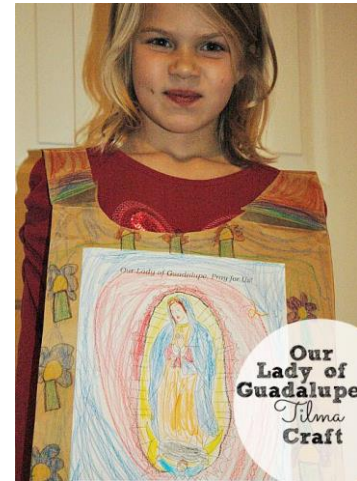
##### Supplies you'll need:

- Paper Grocery Sacks or Brown Craft Paper
- Our Lady of Guadalupe template (Many thanks to Domestic Church)
- Crayons or Markers
- Glue
- Scissors
- Brightly colored yarn



- Single Hole Punch
- Rose Stickers

When Our Lady is finished, glue her to the tilma. Don't forget the roses! (If you're like me and can't draw, you could use rose stickers!)



## CHRISTMAS: GLORY TO GOD

**Beginning:** (+) God come to my assistance, Lord, make haste to help me.

**Opening Prayer:** O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, I pray, that I may once again share fully in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity through this celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I ask this through Jesus Christ Your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 2:8-14

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the

heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So, they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

### **Quick Reflections:**

The message of the angels to the shepherds "Do not be afraid" is a good message for us to hear as we prepare for the sacrament of Reconciliation. God desires to be with us so much that He became one with us in Jesus. He does not come as a dictator demanding our love and forcing us to His will instead He comes as an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes. Do not miss this opportunity to be reconciled with our God!!!

### **Examination of Conscience**

#### *Ten Commandments:*

- I. "I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before Me." (Ex 20:2,3)
- II. "You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain." (Ex 20:7)
- III. "Remember that you keep holy the Sabbath Day." (Ex 20:8)
- IV. "Honor your father and your mother." (Ex 20:12)
- V. "You shall not kill." (Ex 20:13)
- VI. "You shall not commit adultery." (Ex 20:14)
- VII. "You shall not steal." (Ex 20:15)
- VIII. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Ex 20:16)
- IX. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." (Ex 20:17)
- X. "You shall not covet your neighbor's goods." (Ex 20:17)

#### *Other Sins*

1. Did I fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday? Did I eat meat on the Fridays of Lent or Ash Wednesday?
2. Did I fail to receive Holy Communion during Eastertime?
3. Did I go to Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin? Without fasting (water and medicine permitted) for one hour from food and drink?
4. Did I make a bad confession?
5. Did I fail to contribute to the support of the Church?

### **Time For Individual Confession**

At this time, you should go and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the priest and afterwards come back and pray your prayer of thanksgiving in addition to your penance.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

God and Father, I praise you, the source of all that I have and am. Teach me to acknowledge always the many good things your infinite love has given me. Help me to love you with all my heart and all my strength. I ask this through Christ our Lord Amen.

### **Blessing**

May almighty God bless me (+), protect me from all evil and bring me to everlasting life. Amen



# December

L N X D D B S W A M B R O S E  
G S A C P F Y G K B K S E O F  
X U V Y W N E U G C H V K P Y  
J H I F Z A M A R P J B G S L  
U O E I S T J D F A M I L Y X  
R P R M D I U A S T E P H E N  
E E C M I V A L I P U T M T L  
J L H A E I N U N J E D A E V  
O U R C G T G P N O E A D H D  
I C I U O Y A E O H T A C S R  
C Y S L S U Q Y C N C D I E F  
E I T A E B Z V E P B V X W E  
L R M T V H P P N Z I E T Y L  
T T A E E N R J T X P N O M B  
D G S K P I M J S I D T X M Y

Immaculate

Guadalupe

Innocents

John

Stephen

Christmas

Rejoice

Juan

Ambrose

Family

Nativity

Lucy

Peace

Advent

Xavier

Diego

Hope

## PRAYERS



### Pope Francis' Prayer for the Immaculate Conception

O Mary, our Immaculate Mother,  
On your feast day I come to you,  
And I come not alone:  
I bring with me all those with whom your Son entrusted to me,  
In this city of Rome and in the entire world,  
That you may bless them and preserve them from harm.  
I bring to you, Mother, children,  
Especially those who are alone, abandoned,  
And for this reason are tricked and exploited.  
I bring to you, Mother, families,  
Who carry forward life and society  
With their daily and hidden efforts;  
In a special way the families who struggle the most  
For their many internal and external problems.  
I bring to you, Mother, all workers, both men and women,  
And I entrust to you especially those who, out of need,  
Are forced to work in an unworthy profession  
And those who have lost work or are unable to find it.  
We are in need of your immaculate gaze,  
To rediscover the ability to look upon persons and things  
With respect and awareness,  
Without egotistical or hypocritical interests.  
We are in need of your immaculate heart,  
To love freely,  
Without secondary aims but seeking the good of the other,  
With simplicity and sincerity, renouncing masks and tricks.  
We are in need of your immaculate hands,  
To caress with tenderness,  
To touch the flesh of Jesus  
In our poor, sick, or despised brethren,  
To raise up those who have fallen and support those who waver.  
We are in need of your immaculate feet,  
To go toward those who know not how to make the first step,

To walk on the paths of those who are lost,  
To find those who feel alone.  
We thank you, O Mother, because in showing yourself to us  
You free us of all stain of sin;  
You remind us that what comes first is the grace of God,  
The love of Jesus Christ who gave his life for us,  
The strength of the Holy Spirit which renews all things.  
Let us not give in to discouragement,  
But, trusting in your constant help,  
Let us engage ourselves fully in renewal of self,  
Of this city and of the entire world.  
Pray for us, Holy Mother of God!

### A Prayer to our Lady of Guadalupe

Virgin of Guadalupe,  
Patroness of unborn children,  
we implore your intercession  
for every child at risk of abortion.  
Help expectant parents to welcome from God  
the priceless gift of their child's life.  
Console parents who have lost that gift  
through abortion,  
and lead them to forgiveness and healing  
through the Divine Mercy of your Son.  
Teach us to cherish  
and to care for family and friends  
until God calls them home.  
Help us never to see others as burdens.  
Guide our public officials  
to defend each and every human life  
through just laws.  
Inspire us all to bring our faith into public life,  
to speak for those who have no voice.  
We ask this in the name of your Son,  
Jesus Christ, who is Love and Mercy itself.  
Amen.

### Christmas Prayers

#### A PRAYER TO REMEMBER WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT

"Lord, I thank You for coming to earth so You could redeem me. When I think of the extent to which You were willing to go in order to save me, it makes me want to shout, to celebrate, and to cry with thankfulness. You love me so much, and I am so grateful for that love. Without You, I would still be lost and in sin. But because of everything You have done for me, today I am free; my life is blessed; Jesus is my Lord; Heaven is my home; and Satan has no right to control me. I will be eternally thankful to

You for everything You did to save me! I pray this in Jesus' name!" — Rick Renner

"God, our Creator, we offer this humble prayer on Christmas Day. We come to worship with a song of thanks in our hearts—a song of redemption, a song of hope and renewal. We pray for joy in our hearts, hope in our God, love to forgive, and peace upon the earth. We ask for the salvation of all our family members and friends, and we pray your blessings on all people. May there be bread for the hungry, love for the unlovable, healing for the sick, protection for our children, and wisdom for our youth. We pray for the forgiveness of sinners and abundant life in Christ. Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your love and power. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen." — Rev. Lia Icaza Willetts

#### **NATIVITY PRAYER**

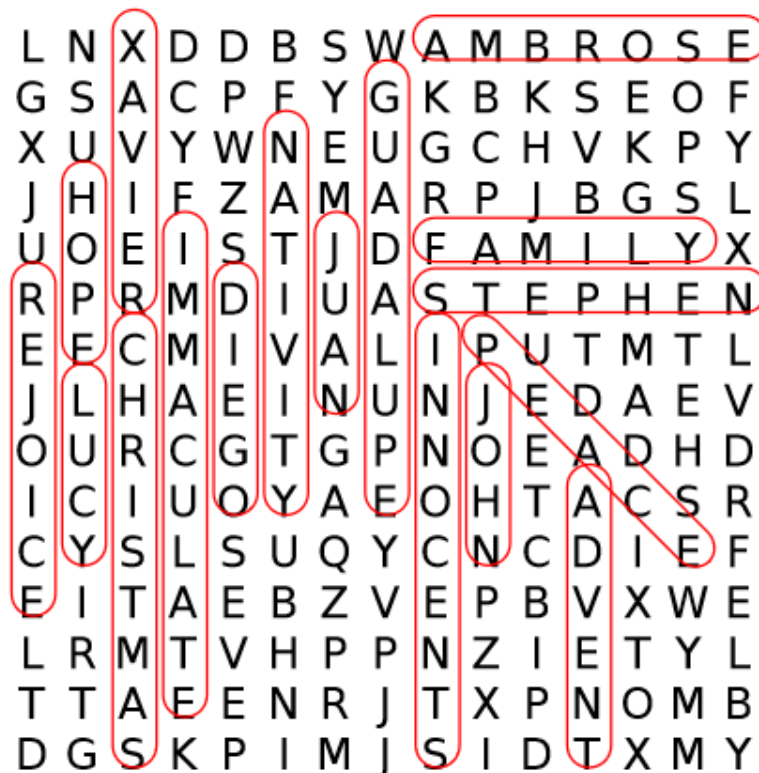
"Let Your goodness Lord appear to us, that we made in your image, conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imitate Your majesty, power, and wonder nor is it fitting for us to try. But Your mercy reaches from the heavens through the clouds to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love. Caress us with Your tiny hands, embrace us with Your tiny arms and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries. Amen." — St. Bernard of Clairvaux

#### **CHRISTMAS SEASON LITANY**

Blessed are you, Lord God.  
Blessed are you forever.  
Holy is your name.  
Blessed are you forever.  
You have sent your Son to be one of us, our brother.  
Blessed are you forever.  
You chose Mary the Virgin to be his mother. Blessed are you forever.  
You love your people with deepest love.  
Blessed are you forever.  
You have sent your Son to save us from sin.  
Blessed are you forever.  
Great is your mercy for your people.  
Blessed are you forever.  
You fill your children with joy and peace.  
Blessed are you forever.  
You call us to praise your name.  
Blessed are you forever.  
Look with love upon your holy Church.  
Blessed are you forever.  
Send the Spirit of your Son into our hearts.  
Blessed are you forever.  
Let us bring glory and praise to your name.  
Blessed are you forever.  
Through Jesus Christ your Son.  
Blessed are you forever.  
And in the love of your Holy Spirit.  
Blessed are you forever.



# December



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