

# Sacred Heart

## CATHOLIC CHURCH

Corner of E. First Avenue  
& Hamlet Street

Church Mailing Address:  
168 E. Lincoln Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Parish Office  
(614) 294-5319

**Msgr. Frank Lane, Administrator**  
(Territorial Parish ~ Est. 1875)

### MASSES:

**Saturday:** 4:00 p.m.; **Sunday:** 11:00 a.m.

### WEEKDAYS & HOLY DAYS:

*See Mass Schedule inside the Bulletin.*

### PARISH OFFICE/STAFF:

Administration is done through the office of Saint John the Baptist, 168 Lincoln Street. Requests for copies of sacramental records, scheduling of Masses and other sacramental celebrations, and non-emergency needs should be made during regular office hours or email [info@sjbitaliana.org](mailto:info@sjbitaliana.org).

Please notify the Parish Office of any changes such as address or telephone number, etc., by calling during regular office Hours.

### MUSIC MINISTRY:

**Gina M. Bishop**, Music Director  
**John C. Huffman**, Organist

### PARISH MEMBERSHIP:

We welcome you into our Parish Families.  
Membership in the parish consists of two parts:

**Registration:** Please complete the parish registration and return to Parish Office.

### OFFICE STAFF

Aggie Howard, Executive Assistant, [ahoward@sjbitaliana.org](mailto:ahoward@sjbitaliana.org)  
Victoria Scruggs, Secretary & Bulletin Editor, [vgammell@sjbitaliana.org](mailto:vgammell@sjbitaliana.org)  
**Office Hours: Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.**

### RECONCILIATION:

**Saturday:** 3:30 p.m.; **Sunday:** 10:30 a.m.

### BAPTISM:

Preparation is required for the reception of the sacrament.  
Parents are encouraged to call the office  
and set up an appointment before the birth of their child.

### MATRIMONY:

Arrangements should be made at least six or more months in advance.  
A marriage preparation program is required.

### SACRAMENT OF THE SICK:

**In cases of emergencies, please call anytime.**  
**Please notify the Parish Office for Communion calls to the sick, shut-ins.**

Due to privacy laws, if parishioners wish to be visited in the hospital,  
they should contact the Parish Office directly  
and give the information regarding the hospitalization.

**If you are scheduled for surgeries or other medical procedures,**  
please contact the Parish Office in advance so that a priest can administer  
Anointing of the Sick prior to the procedure.

### BULLETIN DEADLINE:

Announcements must be submitted in writing by Tuesday at noon.

[www.sacredheartchurchcolumbus.org](http://www.sacredheartchurchcolumbus.org)



**SACRED HEART**

Today, we begin the season of **ADVENT**. We have journeyed with the **Lord** throughout the year and come to the edge of eternity. Now, we pause and return to the beginning to walk the road once more to salvation in the company of **Jesus** and the **Apostles**. Each time we travel the life journey with the **Lord**, we have the opportunity to grow in our awareness of who **Jesus** is and what He has done for us.

May we pray that this time we gain new insights and new depth in our faith and our appreciation of all that the **Lord** is doing for us. May we also grow closer to the mystery of **God** made present in humanity and in the world which He has created.

**Many Blessings for the week!**  
Fr. Lane

*Confession Time for Saturdays  
will be from 3:00-3:45 p.m.*

If you are interested in becoming Catholic, receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, or Baptism, please contact Sacred Heart Office at 614-294-5319 for more information.

For Weddings and Funerals, please contact Aggie Howard at ahoward@sjbitaliana.org or call the office at 614-294-5319.

**Mass Time Change:** Mass times at Sacred Heart are Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. and St. John the Baptist are Mondays, Tuesdays at 9:00 a.m. and Wednesday evenings at 6:00 p.m. followed by RCIA at 7:00 p.m. at St. John the Baptist Parish Library on the second floor.

**MASSES AT SACRED HEART**

Saturday 12/2	4:00 p.m.	+ Jim Neymeyer by the Thurn Family
Sunday 12/3	11:00 a.m.	+ Helen B.
Thursday 12/7	6:30 p.m.	+ Ralph Guggenbiller by Carla Guggenbiller
Friday 12/8	10:30 a.m.	+ Robert Stefanov by Joe & Debbie Stefanov
Saturday 12/9	4:00 p.m.	+ Robert Stefanov by Joe & Debbie Stefanov
Sunday 12/10	11:00 a.m.	+ Romeo & Gloria Sinang by Jim & Gloria Merckling
Thursday 12/14	6:30 p.m.	+ Dennis Siebold by Teresa Thurn

**DONATION QR CODE AND WEBSITE INFORMATION**



Please help Sacred Heart maintain this beautiful 100-year-old building with a donation by using the QR code. Thank you!



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**WEEKLY STEWARDSHIP AT SACRED HEART**

November 26, 2023

Number of Envelopes used Sunday – 15

In Env:	\$ 747.00
Loose:	\$ 982.00
Holy Day:	\$ 10.00
Total	\$ 1,739.00
Less Diocesan 8% Assessment	\$ -(139.12)
	\$ 1,599.88

Diocesan Charities	\$ 10.00
Community Outreach	\$ 25.00
Capital Repair	\$ 27.00
Religious Retirement	\$ 10.00
Total	\$ 72.00

**HOW IS SACRED HEART DOING?**

Budgeted Offertory for Fiscal Year (7/1/23-6/30/24)

	Budgeted	Actual	Difference (\$)
This Wk.:	\$ 2,800.00	\$ 1,739.00	-\$ 1,061.00
FYTD:	\$ 54,600.00	\$ 41,241.25	-\$ 13,358.75

Income and Expenses from September 1, through September 30, 2023.

Income:	\$ 15,440.20
Expense:	\$ 25,023.45
Difference:	-\$ 9,583.25

**SH Collection Counters for Monday, December 4, 2023**

Donna Bowers and Mike Padovan

**SH Collection Counters for Monday, December 11, 2023**

David and Gilda Cottrill

**CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S MASS SCHEDULE 2023**

Christmas Vigil	Church	Mass Time
December 24	Sacred Heart	9:00 p.m.
	St. John	4:00 p.m.
Christmas Day	Church	Mass Time
December 25	Sacred Heart	10:30 a.m.
	St. John	No Mass
New Year's Eve	Church	Mass Time
December 31	Sacred Heart	11:00 am & 5:00 p.m.
	St. John	9:30 a.m.
New Year's Day	Church	Mass Time
January 1	Sacred Heart	No Mass
	St. John	11:00 a.m.

**RCIA:** Classes are now being offered for both Sacred Heart and St. John the Baptist parishes on Wednesday evenings right after the 6:00 p.m. Mass at St. John. RCIA class starts at 7:00 p.m. in the Parish Library located on the second floor. This class is required for anyone who wants to enter the Catholic Church, for those baptized Catholic but did not complete the Initiation Sacraments, as well as those who simply desire to deepen their understanding of Catholicism. Questions? Contact Sharon Curtin at 614-563-8405, or [SCurtin@sjbitaliana.org](mailto:SCurtin@sjbitaliana.org).



**Office Hours:** Parish Office hours are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

**Feast of the Immaculate Conception** is December 8, a Holy Day of Obligation. Mass at Sacred Heart will be at 10:30 a.m. and 12:00 noon at St. John.

**PARISH SCHOOL OF RELIGION: PARISH SCHOOL OF RELIGION:**

After careful consideration, **Monsignor Lane** has decided we no longer will offer religious education, Grades 1-8, at **St. John the Baptist** or **Sacred Heart Parishes**. After five weeks of trying to engage children and parents into the program, it was decided there was not enough interest at this time. Granted, it has been many years since religious education was offered here, and many of the parishioners are older; however, this area is growing, and there will be new folks interested in joining this parish. They will want to have an active, religious education program. We will try again in **March 2024** to begin registration for the **Fall**. It is our hope there will be a few children who will join the program, as well as parents willing to assist. We will continue to invite grandchildren of parishioners, as well as non-Catholic children. If you have any questions, please call **Sharon Curtin** at 614-563-8405 or [SCurtin@sjbitaliana.org](mailto:SCurtin@sjbitaliana.org).

**Christmas Flowers:** Christmas poinsettias are available again this year. Flowers may be requested in memory of a loved one and will be placed on the altar throughout the **Christmas Season**. An envelope for **Christmas** poinsettias is included in the **December** offertory envelopes. You may also put your donation and memorial request in a regular envelope and place it in the collection basket. There is a suggested donation of **\$10.00 per poinsettia**. The **Christmas** flowers add such beauty to **Sacred Heart** during this special time of year. Thank you.

**Bishop Watterson High School** choirs will hold their Christmas Concert on Tuesday, December 12 at Sacred Heart Church at 7:00 p.m. All are invited.

## AROUND US

**You are invited to pray for the Holy Father's Intentions for the Month of December 2023:** *We pray that people living with disabilities may be at the center of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusive programs which value their active participation.*

**Liturgical Calendar:** The first two days of **December** fall during the liturgical season known as **Ordinary Time** and is represented by the liturgical color green. The next **22** days fall during the liturgical season of **Advent** and are represented by the liturgical color purple. The remaining days of **December** mark the beginning of the **Christmas** season. The liturgical color changes to white or gold – a symbol of joy, purity, and innocence. The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

**NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN FOR THE 2024 CATHOLIC MAN OF THE YEAR:**

The **Catholic Men's Luncheon Club** is accepting nominations for the **Diocese of Columbus 2024 Catholic Man of the Year**. The annual award will be presented by **Bishop Earl Fernandes** on **Friday, February 2, 2024**, at the **Men's Luncheon** held at **St. Patrick Church** in downtown **Columbus**. The **Catholic Man of the Year** is awarded to one layman who, through his daily actions, words, and prayers, exemplifies the "good and faithful servant." The recipient will have the opportunity to share his personal testimony during the ceremony. Nominations will be accepted through **Sunday, December 31, 2023**. For details, nomination instructions and the required online nomination form, go to <https://www.catholicmensministry.com/catholicmanoftheyear>. Submit your nomination and let us know why your parishioner, husband, father, son, uncle, brother, or friend is the **Catholic Man of the Year!**



**CHARITY NEWSIES PAPER SALE AND PRESIDENT'S CHURCH SERVICE:**

Since 1907, **Charity Newsies** have provided warm new clothing to school-age children in **Franklin County**. The **Newsies** have clothed **800,000** children. On **Saturday, December 9th**, **300 Newsies** will take to the streets and sell a special edition of the **Dispatch** for "whatever your heart tells you to give" with **100%** going to clothe children. **Newsies** is excited to announce again this year the **President's Church Service** will be held at **St. John the Baptist Church** on **Sunday, December 3 at 9:30 a.m.** **Charity Newsie** members will be notified of this **Mass**. Please keep the **Newsies** in your prayers for a safe and successful paper sale.

**December 12: Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe:** Mary, who was "intimately united with the birth of the Church in America, became the radiant Star illuminating the proclamation of Christ the Savior to the sons of these nations." – John Paul II

**Today's Gospel:** The **Gospel** is taken from **Mark 13:33-37**. "Watch!" is **Christ's** advice and command. We don't know the year, the day, or the hour when our master will call us. That year, day and hour will be unexpected, even if we are advanced in years or have been suffering from prolonged illness. We shall not be unprepared for it if we have tried all our lives to be faithful to **Christ** and to our **Christian** faith. This holy season of **Advent** is an opportune time for each one of us to investigate one's life and see how one stands with **God**. **Christmas** should remind us of the Second Coming of **Christ**, which will be very soon for all of us.

– Excerpted from *The Sunday Readings*  
by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan, O.F.M.



**Welcome to Advent:** For **Catholics**, the new **Liturgical Year** commences today with the **First Sunday of Advent**, opening the **Advent** season. In this new **Liturgical Year**, the **Church** not only wishes to indicate the beginning of a period, but the beginning of a renewed commitment to the faith by all those who follow **Christ** – this time of prayer and penance. The entire **Liturgy of the Advent** season spurs us to an awakening in our **Christian** life and will put us in a "vigilant" disposition, to wait for **Our Lord Jesus** who is coming. The **first Sunday of Advent** symbolizes **Hope** with the "Prophet's Candle" reminding us that **Jesus** is coming.

**Prayer:** *Grant Your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen*

# Lectio Divina

SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

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“What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?” ~Saint Benedict, from the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (73:3)

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*The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.*

***“Let your door stand open to receive Him, unlock your soul to Him, offer Him a welcome in your mind, and then you will see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the joy of grace.”*** +SAINT AMBROSE

## **Monday, December 4 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Saint John Damascene, Priest and Doctor of the Church**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:5-11** When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.” He said to him, “I will come and cure him.” The centurion said in reply, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come here,’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven.”

**Meditation:** In the Roman world the position of centurion was very important. He was an officer in charge of a hundred soldiers. In a certain sense, he was the backbone of the Roman army, the cement which held the army together. The centurion who approached Jesus was not only courageous, but faith-filled as well. He risked the ridicule of his cronies as well as mockery from the Jews by seeking help from an itinerant preacher from Galilee. Nonetheless, the centurion approached Jesus with great confidence and humility. He was an extraordinary man because he loved his slave. In the Roman world slaves were treated like animals – something to be used for work and pleasure and for bartering and trade. This centurion was a man of great compassion and extraordinary faith. He wanted Jesus to heal his beloved slave. Jesus commends him for his faith and immediately grants him his request.

**Prayer:** Grant, we pray, O Lord, that we may be helped by the prayers of the Priest Saint John Damascene, so that the true faith, which he excelled in teaching, may always be our light and our strength. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** The prophet Isaiah foretold a time of restoration for the holy city Jerusalem and for its remnants (ref. Isaiah 4:2-6) and also a time of universal peace when all nations would come to Jerusalem to “the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob” and “beat their swords into plowshares” (Isaiah 2:2-4). Jesus fulfills this prophecy first by restoring both Jew and Gentile to fellowship with God through the victory he won for us on the cross. When he comes again he will fully establish his universal rule of peace and righteousness and unite all things in himself (ref. Ephesians 1:10). His promise extends to all generations who believe in him that we, too, might feast at the heavenly banquet table with the patriarchs of the Old Covenant who believed but did not see the promised Messiah. And so we need to ask ourselves: Do you believe in God's promises and do you seek his kingdom first in your life? The season of Advent reminds us that the Lord wants us to actively seek him and the coming of his kingdom in our lives. The Lord will surely reward those who seek his will for their lives. We can approach the Lord Jesus with expectant faith, like the centurion did in today's gospel reading, knowing that he will show us his mercy, love, compassion, along with guidance and help in our time of need.

## **Tuesday, December 5 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent**

**Holy Gospel: Luke 10:21-24** Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed

over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." Turning to the disciples in private he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

**Meditation:** What does Jesus' prayer in today's gospel tell us about God and about ourselves? First, it tells us that God is both Father and Lord of earth as well as heaven. He is both Creator and Author of all that he has made, the first origin of everything and transcendent authority, and at the same time, goodness and loving care for all his children. All fatherhood and motherhood are derived from him (ref. Ephesians 3:14-15). Jesus' prayer also contains a warning that pride can keep us from the love and knowledge of God. Pride closes the mind to God's truth and wisdom for our lives. Jesus contrasts pride with child-like simplicity and humility. The simple of heart are like "babes" in the sense that they see purely without pretense and acknowledge their dependence and trust in God who is the source of all wisdom and strength. They seek one thing – the "summum bonum" or "greatest good" which is God himself. Simplicity of heart is wedded with humility, the queen of virtues, because humility inclines the heart towards grace and truth. Just as pride is the root of every sin and evil, so humility is the only soil in which the grace of God can take root. It alone takes the right attitude before God and allows him as God to do all. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Prov. 3:34, James 4:6). The grace of Christ-like humility inclines us towards God and disposes us to receive God's wisdom, grace, and help. Nothing can give us greater joy than the knowledge that we are God's beloved and that our names are written in heaven (ref. Luke 10:20).

**Prayer:** Look with favor, Lord God, on our petitions, and in our trials grant us your compassionate help, that, consoled by the presence of your Son, whose coming we now await, we may be tainted no longer by the corruption of former ways. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** Jesus makes a claim which no one would have dared to make – He is the perfect revelation of God. Our knowledge of God is not simply limited to knowing something about God, but we can know God personally. Jesus makes it possible for each of us to personally know God as our Father. To see Jesus is to see what God is like. In Jesus we see the perfect love of God – a God who cares intensely and who yearns over men and women, loving them to the point of laying down his life for them upon the Cross. Do you pray to your Father in heaven with joy and confidence in his love and care for you?

### **Wednesday, December 6 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Saint Nicholas, Bishop**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 15:29-37** At that time: Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, went up on the mountain, and sat down there. Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see, and they glorified the God of Israel. Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way." The disciples said to him, "Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" "Seven," they replied, "and a few fish." He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.

**Meditation:** What can satisfy the deepest hunger and longing of the human heart? Isaiah prophesied that God would provide a heavenly banquet for all peoples and would destroy death once and for all (Isaiah 2:6-8). Jesus came to fulfill that promise. Jesus' miracles are both a sign of God's kingdom and a demonstration of God's power. They also show the magnitude of God's mercy. When the disciples were confronted by Jesus with the task of feeding four thousand people many miles away from any source of food, they exclaimed: Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them? The Israelites were confronted with the same dilemma when they fled Egypt and found themselves in a barren wilderness. Like the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness, Jesus, himself provides bread in abundance for the hungry crowd who came out into the desert to seek him. The gospel records that all were satisfied and they took up what was left over.

**Prayer:** We humbly implore your mercy, Lord: protect us in all dangers through the prayers of the Bishop Saint Nicholas, that the way of salvation may lie open before us. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** In the multiplication of the loaves and fishes we see a sign and a symbol of what God always does. God knows our needs and he cares. When God gives, he gives in abundance. The gospel account records that the leftovers from the miraculous meal was more than seven times the amount they began with. Seven is a symbol of completion and wholeness. When God gives, he gives until we are satisfied. When God works for his people he gives abundantly – more than we could deserve and more than we need. He nourishes us with his life-giving word and with the bread of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven God will feast us at his banquet table. And do you long with expectant hope for the coming of his kingdom in all its fullness? If not, what is getting in your way? What is holding you back?

### **Thursday, December 7 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 7:21, 24-27** Jesus said to his disciples: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined."

**Meditation:** In the ancient world a strong city, an impregnable fortress, and a secure house were built on solid rock because they could withstand the forces of nature and foe alike. Isaiah speaks of God as an "everlasting rock" (Is. 26:4). He is the rock of refuge and deliverance (Psalm 18:2) and the rock in whom there is no wrong (Psalm 92:15). Scripture warns that destruction will surely come to those who place their security in something other than God and his kingdom. Jesus' parables invite us to stake our lives on the coming of his kingdom or face the consequences of being unprepared when the day of testing and destruction will surely come.

**Prayer:** O God, who made the Bishop Saint Ambrose a teacher of the Catholic faith and a model of apostolic courage, raise up in your Church men after your own heart to govern her with courage and wisdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** When Jesus told the story of the builders he likely had the following proverb in mind: "When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever" (Proverbs 10:25). What's the significance of the story for us? The kind of foundation we build our lives upon will determine whether we can survive the storms that are sure to come. Builders usually lay their foundations when the weather and soil conditions are at their best. It takes foresight to know how a foundation will stand up against adverse conditions. Building a house on a flood plain, such as a dry river-bed, is a sure bet for disaster! Jesus prefaced his story with a warning: We may fool humans with our speech, but God cannot be deceived. He sees the heart as it truly is – with its motives, intentions, desires, and choices (Psalm 139:2). There is only one way in which a person's sincerity can be proved, and that is by one's practice. Fine words can never replace good deeds. Our character is revealed in the choices we make, especially when we are tested. Do you cheat on an exam or on your income taxes, especially when it will cost you? Do you lie, or cover-up, when disclosing the truth will cause you injury or embarrassment? A true person is honest and reliable before God, one's neighbor and oneself. His or her word can be counted on. If you heed God's word and live according to it then you need not fear when storms assail you. God will be your rock and your refuge. Is your life built upon the sure "rock" of Jesus Christ? Do you listen to and embrace the word of the Lord as if your life depended on it? If not, why not?

### **Friday, December 8 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary ~ A Holy Day of Obligation ~**

**Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26-38** The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid,



Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

**Meditation:** Do you want to live a grace-filled life? The angel Gabriel salutes Mary as "full of grace." To become the mother of the Savior, Mary was enriched by God with gifts to enable her to assume this awesome role. There is a venerable tradition among many Christians, dating back to the early church, for honoring Mary as the spotless virgin who bore the Son of God in her womb. A number of early Church fathers link Mary's obedience to this singular grace of God. One of them Saint Irenaeus, wrote: "Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. The knot of Eve's disobedience was united by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith."

**Prayer:** O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they immediately experienced the consequence of their action – separation from the God who loved them. God in his mercy promised them a Redeemer who would pay the price for their sin and the sin of the world. We see the marvelous unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. Mary's prompt response of "yes" to the divine message is a model of faith for all believers. Mary believed God's promises even when they seemed impossible. She was full of grace because she trusted that what God said was true and would be fulfilled. She was willing and eager to do God's will, even if it seemed difficult or costly. God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heart-felt trust as Mary did. When God commands he also gives the grace, strength, and means to respond. We can either yield to his grace, or resist and go our own way. Choose the path of Mary, not of Eve.

**About today's Solemnity:** Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the solemn dogma defined by Blessed Pope Pius IX in 1854. As Our Lady Immaculately Conceived is the patroness of the United States of America, this is a holy day of obligation in the United States. Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, "full of grace" through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Blessed Pope Pius IX proclaimed on December 8, 1854: "The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin."

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Daily meditations and contemplations adapted from the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* web page and *Biblical Medications for Advent* by Rev. Carroll StuhlmueLLer, C.P.; prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011; information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.

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