



AND THE

# Word

BECAME FLESH AND  
MADE HIS DWELLING  
AMONG US, AND  
WE SAW  
HIS GLORY,

JOHN 1:14

*Christmas 2023*

## **Sacred Heart Church**

Corner of E. First Avenue & Hamlet Street

Columbus, OH 43215

614-294-5319

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

**SACRED HEART**



*My prayers this holy season are for all of you and your families. I thank you all for your generous support of Sacred Heart throughout the years. May the Incarnate God, Son of Mary, bless you in this holy time and new year. On behalf of my staff Aggie Howard, Victoria Scruggs, Gina Bishop, and John Huffman, we wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Blessed Happy New Year!*

*In Jesus through Mary,  
Msgr. Frank Lane*



Confession Time for Saturdays  
Will be from 3:00-3:45 p.m.  
Confession Time for Sundays  
half-hour before Mass

**MASSES AT SACRED HEART**

Saturday 12/23	4:00 p.m.	+ Tommy Dean Compton by The Knoppe Family
Sunday 12/24	11:00 a.m. 9:00 p.m. Christmas Vigil	Living & Deceased Members of Sacred Heart  + Elisa Sinang by Jim & Gloria Merckling
Monday 12/25	10:30 a.m.	+ Jack L.
Thursday 12/28	6:30 p.m.	+ Paul & Patty Thurn by The Thurn Family
Saturday 12/30	4:00 p.m.	+ Leo Thurn by Thurn Family + Emilio & Maria Cutillo Coccia by Dr. Maria Coccia
Sunday 12/31	11:00 a.m. SJB 5:00 p.m.	+ Thomas & Kathleen MacKinnon by John MacKinnon
Monday 1/1	NO MASS	

If you are interested in becoming Catholic, receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, or Baptism, please contact the 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.

**WEEKLY STEWARDSHIP AT SACRED HEART**

December 17, 2023

Number of Envelopes used Sunday – 13

In Env:	\$ 490.00
Loose:	\$ 1,412.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,902.00</b>
<b>Less Diocesan 8% Assessment</b>	<b>\$ -(152.16)</b>
	<b>\$ 1,749.84</b>
Votives	\$ 14.00
Christmas Flowers	\$ 95.00
Religious Retirement Fund	\$ 100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 209.00</b>

?? ?? HOW IS SACRED HEART DOING? ?? ??

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

	Budgeted	Actual	Difference (\$)
This Wk.:	\$ 2,800.00	\$ 1,902.00	-\$ 898.00
FYTD:	\$ 63,000.00	\$ 48,927.00	-( \$ 14,073.00)

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

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

**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!



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

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



*Sacred Heart ~ Christmas Flowers ~ 2023*

**Name:**

**In Memory/In Honor of:**

<b>Ms. Donna Bowers</b>	<b>The Thomas, Webb &amp; Withers Families</b>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. David Cottrill</b>	<b>---</b>
<b>Diane Endrizzi</b>	<b>Endrizzi &amp; Winningham Families</b>
<b>Ms. Aggie Howard</b>	<b>Harry Gray</b>
<b>Mr. Dennis W. Jacob</b>	<b>Andrew &amp; Margaret Jacob, Donald Jacob &amp; Stevie Rae Jacob</b>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Jay Jadwin</b>	<b>The Jadwin, Belan Families, Loretta Rosenberger</b>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Robert Lorain</b>	<b>Deceased Members of Sacred Heart</b>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. James Merckling</b>	<b>Sinang, Cubi, Hartigan &amp; Merckling Families</b>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Michael Padovan</b>	<b>The Kinnaird &amp; Padovan Families</b>
<b>John and Nancy Pawlowski</b>	<b>Pawlowski &amp; Patacca Families</b>
<b>Ms. Judy Pishitelli</b>	<b>Floranel Graham Family</b>
<b>Ms. Mary Rykowski</b>	<b>Thomas Jaconette &amp; Ida Jaconette, Jim Jaconette &amp; Don Yates &amp; Sue Yates</b>
<b>Ms. Teresa Thurn</b>	<b>Thurn, Meier, Eckstein, Wachinger Families &amp; Jim Neymeyer</b>
<b>Ms. Rita Ward</b>	<b>Bruno Del Col, The Ward &amp; Yuscavitch Families</b>
<b>Mr. Brian West</b>	<b>Carl and Kathleen West</b>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Geoffrey Wisniewski</b>	<b>The Wisniewski &amp; Moorman Families</b>

SH Collection Counters for Wednesday, December 27, 2023  
Dave and Gilda Cottrill

SH Collection Counters for Wednesday, January 3, 2024  
 Rita Ward and Aggie Howard



**Office Hours:** Parish Office hours are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Our Office will be closed for Christmas, Monday, December 25th, and Tuesday, December 26th and will resume on Wednesday, December 27th.

**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).**

## 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**.

**JOIN Needs Your Help!** **JOIN (Joint Organization for Inner-City Needs)** is often a “stop-gap” for our brothers and sisters who are doing their best to provide and succeed in life. We all come upon unexpected obstacles. For our neighbors who live paycheck to paycheck, that can be something as simple as missing work due to illness or something bigger, like a car repair. Basic supplies like toilet paper, soap, shampoo, conditioner, multi-purpose cleaning solutions, dish soap and laundry soap are items that people request at **JOIN** daily. **Kelsey** is a mom that came to **JOIN** to get assistance with bus passes for a new job she had. When she learned that we also had cleaning supplies and personal care items, especially toilet paper, she was overwhelmed that she could get those items as well. Meeting these most basic needs, when you don't have them, is a relief that is not measurable to a parent. Try to imagine running out of something, with no hope of getting it yourself for another week or so. If you would like to organize a collection or even donate an item or two on your own, it would be a gift to the neighbors we serve at **JOIN**. Feel free to call, **614-241-2530**, or email, [lkeita@columbuscatholic.org](mailto:lkeita@columbuscatholic.org), me, **Lisa Keita** to get further information or just discuss what all **JOIN** does provide.



**Fourth Sunday of Advent:** This year **Advent** is very short with **Sunday** being the only day in the fourth week. On the fourth week of **Advent**, we light the final purple candle to mark the final week of prayer and penance as we wait for the birth of our **Savior**. This final candle, the “**Angel's Candle**,” symbolizes peace. It reminds us of the message of the angels: “**Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men.**”

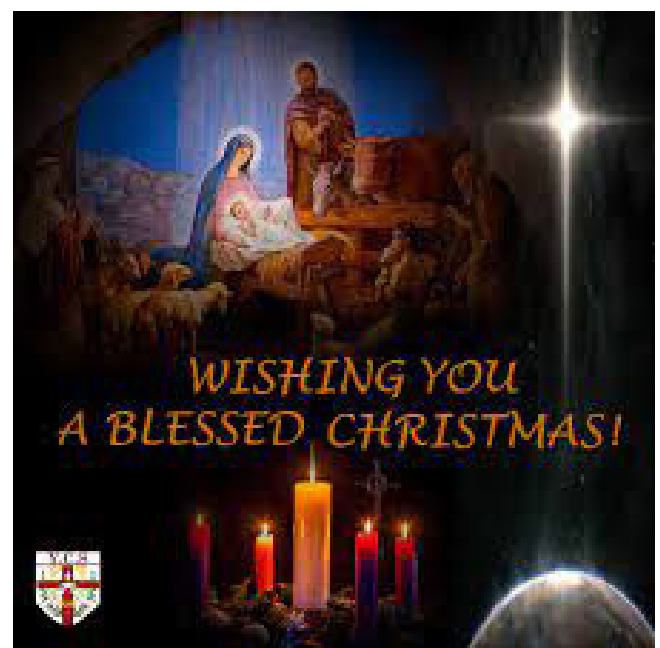
**Christmas:** Today the **Church** celebrates the **Solemnity of the Nativity the Lord**, the **Birth of Jesus Christ**, and the **First Day in the Octave of Christmas**. Throughout **Advent** the **Church** longed ardently for the coming of our **Savior**. Today she celebrates **His** birth with unrestrained joy. “**The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.**” The **Son of God** became man to give us a share in that divine life which is eternally **His** in the **Blessed Trinity**. **Christmas** time begins on **December 24** with the first **Vespers of the feast and ends on the Feast of the Baptism of Christ**. White vestments reappear in our churches as a sign of joy.

**Today's Gospel:** The **Gospel** is from **Luke 1:26-38**. The moment our **Lady** said: “**be it done to me according to thy word**” the most stupendous event that ever happened, or ever could happen on earth, took place on this planet of ours. The **Son of God** took on human nature in the womb of the **Blessed Virgin**. No man or angel could make us adopted sons of **God** and heirs of **heaven**. It was necessary, in **God's** plan for us, that His divine **Son** should become man, should share our humanity so that we could share His divinity. Today is a suitable occasion to look right into our hearts, to see how we stand with **God**. During the week we shall be keeping the feast of **Christmas**. The **Baby** in the manger will remind us of what **God** has done and is still doing for us. What are we doing in return? Have we shown our gratitude by living as true followers of **Christ**? If our answer is: “no,” this is the time to change our course and return to the right road once more. **God** is asking this of us today. Shall our answer be: “**Behold here I am Lord, your humble and grateful servant, let it be done to me according to your word?**”

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

“I invite you to pray, before the creche, that the Nativity of the Lord will bring a ray of peace to children all over the world, especially those forced to live the terrible and dark days of war.”

@Pontifex



**Prayer:** *O God, who has made this most sacred night radiant with the splendor of the true light, grant, we pray, that we, who have known the mysteries of His light on earth, may also delight in His gladness in heaven. Who lives and reigns with You in unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen*

# Lectio Divina

SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

“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)

***“Kiss the feet of the baby Jesus, who lies in the manger, and pray that the Holy Virgin will allow you to hold Him. Take Him between your arms, hold Him and see His lovable face, kiss it with reverence and rejoice with Him. You can do this because He has come to bring salvation to sinners and He has humbly conversed with them, finally giving Himself as food.”*** +SAINT BONAVENTURE

## Monday, December 25 ~ Solemnity of Christmas The Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God

**Holy Gospel: Luke 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 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the 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.”



**Meditation:** Following is an excerpt of a sermon from Pope St. Leo the Great: “Dearly beloved, today our Savior is born; let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life. The fear of death has been swallowed up; life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness. No one is shut out from this joy; all share the same reason for rejoicing. Our Lord, victor over sin and death, finding no man free from sin, came to free us all. Let the saint rejoice as he sees the palm of victory at hand. Let the sinner be glad as he receives the offer of forgiveness. Let the pagan take courage as he is summoned to life. In the fullness of time, chosen in the unfathomable depths of God’s wisdom, the Son of God took for himself our common humanity in order to reconcile it with its creator. He came to overthrow the devil, the origin of death, in that very nature by which he had overthrown mankind. And so at the birth of our Lord the angels sing in joy: Glory to God in the highest, and they proclaim peace to men of good will as they see the heavenly Jerusalem being built from all the nations of the world. When the angels on high are so exultant at this marvelous work of God’s goodness, what joy should it not bring to the lowly hearts of men? Beloved, let us give thanks to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit, because in his great love for us he took pity on us, and when we were dead in our sins he brought us to life with Christ, so that in him we might be a new creation. Let us throw off our old nature and all its ways and, as we have come to birth in Christ, let us renounce the works of the flesh. Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God’s kingdom. Through the sacrament of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ.”

**Prayer:** O God, who gladden us year by year as we wait in hope for our redemption grant that, just as we joyfully welcome your Only Begotten Son as our Redeemer, we may also merit to face him confidently

when he comes again as our Judge. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** On Christmas Day it remains only for us to find in the Gospel, as we find in all the words of the Holy Gospels, the answer as to what we should do in response to the gift that has been given to us, the song that has fallen on our ears from angelic voices. And the answer is there; the birth of this mystery - of love triumphant in the face of evil - is Christ as He came to life from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, and Christ, as we come to life in Him, through the Sacrament we share. Let us pray that our Christmas will be filled with the song of this life, and that our love will conquer all things contrary to Christ, so that we may follow the Son sent by God to redeem us, and do so with love and fidelity to the truths of Christ.

**On the Birth of Jesus, the Son of God:** Today is the great solemnity that shows the world that the Word Incarnate, the Savior of mankind, is finally born. God becoming truly man is an enormous event [...]. Something truly happens that goes beyond any evolutionary process: the fusion of man and God, the creature and the Creator. It is not the progression of another step in the evolutionary process, but the eruption of a personal action, founded on love, that from this point forward reveals to men new space and possibilities. (Joseph Ratzinger in *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, 2001, p. 197). Christmas says to us: alone we can't profoundly change the world to remedy it. Alone, we can make the world better or worse, but we can't save it. Christ came therefore, because left to ourselves; we couldn't escape the 'mortal disease' that has enveloped us from the first moment of conception in our mother's womb. This gives us hope, true hope, and true Christian optimism: I can't do it but He is there! This is the mystery of grace synthesized in the human figure of God incarnate. Christmas Eve and Christmas day are moments of contemplation. We consider, in many dimensions, the mystery of love that was incarnated for us. First of all, we contemplate the light and joy, without forgetting Jesus and Mary's sorrows and sufferings, and the many difficulties that had surrounded them: the cold, the uncomfortable place, the dangers.... It would be good to accompany these thoughts by reciting and meditating slowly on the Holy Rosary, preferably in front of a crib. "Blessed grotto of Bethlehem that testified to the wonders! Who, in this hour would not turn our hearts? Who would not prefer the opulent palace of the King?" (P. Guéranger, *L'Anno Liturgico*, Alba 1959 [orig. franc. 1841], I, p122).

## **Tuesday, December 26 ~ Second Day in the Octave of Christmas Saint Stephen, First Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:17-22** Jesus said to his disciples: "Beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved."

**Meditation:** "You will be hated by all on account of my name," Jesus says in today's gospel. A strange fate indeed for those whose lives are built on truth, love and peace. And yet it is a fate only too sadly confirmed down these many centuries to this very day. Jesus had said that all those who wished to follow him would have to take up their cross and go after him. The servant is no greater than his master. "Whoever loves his own life will lose it; whoever hates his own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am" (John 12:25-26). Stephen clearly is a perfect model of such a Christian disciple.

**Prayer:** Grant, Lord, we pray, that we may imitate what we worship, and so learn to love even our enemies, for we celebrate the heavenly birthday of a man who knew how to pray even for his persecutors. 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:** There are some today who say "religion divides." When we hear this, today's gospel should come to mind, because so many routinely turn their back on God and on his Son, Jesus Christ. By their actions, they are the ones who actually cause division - not those who live their lives in faith of God or his Son Jesus Christ - because by their actions and their lifestyles they freely choose to not follow the laws of God and the teachings of Christ; in doing so they separate themselves from the way, the truth, and the life of Christ. The beauty of this situation, though, is that God always welcomes back those who have sinned, those who have strayed. God sent his Son into this world to teach us right from wrong, to shepherd and guide us, and to lead us on the path to eternal life. With a contrite heart through the

Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can confess our sins, receive absolution, and get back in Christ's fold. What a great thing to do in the Christmas Season – and any time of the year, for that matter!

### **Wednesday, December 27 ~ Third Day in the Octave of Christmas Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist**

**Holy Gospel: John 20:1a, 2-8** On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

**Meditation:** The placement of today's Gospel seems to "rush" in the life of Jesus from his birth – which we celebrated just two days ago – to his resurrection, describing the scene where Peter and the "beloved disciple" rush to the tomb of Jesus after being told by Mary Magdalene that the body is no longer there. But this gospel points to the great love that John the Apostle and Evangelist – the beloved disciple – had for Jesus Christ as the Word Incarnate, the Messiah, the Son of God, the one whose birth we just celebrated. Although the "beloved disciple" got there first, he deferred to Peter who went in first and saw the burial cloths. One of them – the piece that was wrapped around the face – was rolled up in a separate place. When the "beloved disciple" went in, "he saw and he believed" – in other words, he understood the significance of the cloth and he knew that his Lord had risen. And the promise of salvation of all mankind began with the birth of Jesus. I suggest that you read John 1:1-18 today as well.

**Prayer:** O God, who through the blessed Apostle John have unlocked for us the secrets of your Word, grant, we pray, that we may grasp with proper understanding what he has so marvelously brought to our ears. 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:** John in his first epistle testifies: What we have seen, heard, and touched we proclaim as the word of life which existed "from the beginning" (1 John 1:1-4). John bears witness to what has existed from all eternity. This "word of life" is Jesus the word incarnate, whose birth we just celebrated, but also Jesus as the word announced by the prophets and Jesus the word now preached throughout the Christian church for all ages to come. One thing is certain, if Jesus had not risen from the dead and appeared to his disciples, we would never have heard of him. Nothing else could have changed sad and despairing men and women into people radiant with joy and courage. The reality of the resurrection is the central fact of the Christian faith. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord gives us "eyes of faith" to know him and the power of his resurrection. The greatest joy we can have is to encounter the living Christ, sent by God into this world to save and redeem us, to teach us how to live our lives, to shepherd and guide us on the path that leads to eternal life. Get to know Christ personally as your Lord, Savior and Redeemer.

### **Thursday, December 28 ~ Fourth Day in the Octave of Christmas Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 2:13-18** When the magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, Out of Egypt I called my son. When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet: "A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more."

**Meditation:** During this octave of Christmas the Church celebrates the memory of the small children of the neighborhood of Bethlehem put to death by Herod. Sacrificed by a wicked monarch, these innocent lives bear witness to Christ who was persecuted from the time of His birth by a world which would not receive Him. It is Christ Himself who is at stake in this mass-murder of the children; already the choice, for or against Him, is put clearly before men. But the persecutors are powerless, for Christ came to perform a work of salvation that nothing can prevent; when He fell into the hands of His enemies at the

time chosen by God it was to redeem the world by His own Blood. The joy of this Christmas Season is tempered today by a feeling of sadness. But the Church looks principally to the glory of the children, of these innocent victims, whom she shows us in heaven following the Lamb wherever He goes.

**Prayer:** O God, whom the Holy Innocents confessed and proclaimed on this day, not by speaking but by dying, grant, we pray, that the faith in you which we confess with our lips may also speak through our manner of life. 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:** Many ask why God did not prevent this slaughter. Human suffering is indeed a mystery. No explanation seems to satisfy our human craving to understand. These innocent children and their parents suffered for Christ. Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom are the lot of all who chose to follow Jesus Christ. There is no crown without the cross. It was through Jesus' suffering, humiliation, and death on a cross, that our salvation was won. His death won life – eternal life for us. And his blood which was shed for our sake obtained pardon and reconciliation with our heavenly Father.

**The Holy Innocents:** "Blessed are you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah! You suffered the inhumanity of King Herod in the murder of your babes and thereby have become worthy to offer to the Lord a pure host of infants. In full right do we celebrate the heavenly birthday of these children whom the world caused to be born unto an eternally blessed life rather than that from their mothers' womb, for they attained the grace of everlasting life before the enjoyment of the present. The precious death of any martyr deserves high praise because of his heroic confession; the death of these children is precious in the sight of God because of the beatitude they gained so quickly. For already at the beginning of their lives they pass on. The end of the present life is for them the beginning of glory. These then, whom Herod's cruelty tore as sucklings from their mothers' bosom, are justly hailed as 'infant martyr flowers;' they were the Church's first blossoms, matured by the frost of persecution during the cold winter of unbelief." —Saint Augustine

## **Friday, December 29 ~ Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas Optional Memorial, Scripture: Saint Thomas Becket, Bishop and Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 16:24-27** Then Jesus told His disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of man is to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man for what he has done.

**Meditation:** Let's get back to basics and ask ourselves this foundational question: What is the most important investment any of us can make with our life? Jesus poses some probing questions to challenge our assumptions about what is most profitable and worthwhile. In every decision of life we are making ourselves a certain kind of person. The kind of person we are, our character, determines to a large extent the kind of future we will face and live. It is possible that some can gain all the things they set their heart on, only to wake up suddenly and discover that they missed the most important things of all. Of what value are material things if they don't help you gain what truly lasts in eternity. Neither money nor possessions can buy heaven, mend a broken heart, or cheer a lonely person.

**Prayer:** O God, who gave the Martyr Saint Thomas Becket the courage to give up his life for the sake of justice, grant, through his intercession, that, renouncing our life for the sake of Christ in this world, we may find it in heaven. 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 basically asks the question: What will a person give in exchange for his or her life? Never forget that everything we have is an out-right gift from God. We owe him everything – our gifts, abilities, talents – our very lives. It's possible to give God our money, but not ourselves, or to give him lip-service, but not our hearts. A true disciple gladly gives up all that he has in exchange for an unending life of joy and happiness with God. God gives without measure. The joy he offers no sadness or loss can diminish. The cross of Christ leads to victory and freedom from sin and death. What is the cross which Jesus Christ commands me to take up each day? When my will crosses with his will, then his will must be done. Christ is forever – remember that!

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;  
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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