

**DEC. 31/JANUARY 1, 2017      Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God**

1. Joseph's obedience to God was not a one-time thing. His attention to the angel's warning kept Jesus from being murdered by Herod and led to the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah would be a Nazorean. Fidelity to God's will assures the best use of my talents, too!
2. In today's Gospel we are reminded of the poverty of Mary. Her tiny, vulnerable baby is born in a manger. Mary possessed nothing, had no social status, no power, no privileges. But in her hidden lowliness, God's grace worked to offer us Christ, our savior. By our baptism, we too bear the presence of the risen Lord. How might we become more "poor in spirit" in order to better reveal the active presence of Christ in our daily lives?

**JANUARY 7/8, 2017**

## **The Epiphany of the Lord**

1. Today we remember the three wise men from the East who came to pay homage to the infant Jesus, bringing Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gifts we bring – our time, service, and some share of what we earn for the work we do – are equally precious in His sight.
2. The Magi opened their treasures before Jesus, our newborn King, offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The beginning of the year is an ideal time to take inventory of the abundant gifts the Lord has bestowed upon us and our families, and to reflect on how we can use those gifts to serve the Lord during the year ahead.

**OR** St. Paul writes to the Ephesians of the stewardship of God's grace. We are the stewards of God's grace. In this New Year, may we make a greater commitment to glorify God in everything we do and say in order to be better stewards of God's grace. Let us pray that we use this great gift to make others aware of God's presence, and be ready when opportunities present themselves to serve the Lord and thus grow in holiness.

3. ***"They prostrated themselves and did him homage."*** Miriam Webster defines *Epiphany* as "a Christian festival held on January 6 in honor of the coming of the three kings to the infant Jesus Christ" and "A moment in which you suddenly see or understand something in a new or very clear way." For Christians, the Feast of the Epiphany is both. The three astrologers made a difficult journey from a foreign land to Bethlehem to visit a child because they saw a sign of his birth that helped them to "suddenly see or understand something in a new or very clear way." It is unlikely the "Magi" understood the full implications of the birth of Jesus, but they obviously believed he represented hope for a chaotic and cruel world. Is it not ironic that modern day Christmas has become more of an orgy of parties and a frenzy buying and giving presents than a time to reflect on and appreciate that ***Jesus is the Reason for the Season***. Do we make time to ***prostrate ourselves and do him homage*** and to ***see or understand Him in a new or very clear way***. If not, there is still time...

**OR** ***"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage."*** The *Feast of the Epiphany* originated in the Eastern Church and eventually was celebrated in the Roman Rite as the *Manifestation of the Lord* to astrologers from Persia (present day Iran). The magi made the long and difficult journey to Bethlehem to pay homage to a newborn Jewish child. For us it is another opportunity to reflect on the true meaning of the Birth of Christ - God Incarnate - and how he is manifested in our lives. It is an opportunity to ponder: Did we grow in our understanding and appreciation of *Emmanuel* [God is with us]. Have we made an effort equivalent to the Magi to present a gift to the Child Jesus - a gift of our time and a commitment to contribute more of our talents and resources to the mission of the Church and greater involvement in our parish faith community? No? Happily, it is not too late. Those gifts abound in our lives. Are we willing to share them with others and manifest Jesus to others?

**JANUARY 14/15, 2017**

**Second Sunday of Ordinary Time**

1. Today's responsorial psalm is the theme song of the good steward: "Here I am Lord; I come to do your will." May I, too, stand ready to offer myself and my gifts in the service of God.
2. St. Paul urges the Christian community at Corinth to be united with other Christian communities. Christian stewards cultivate solidarity and hospitality among all Christians. So, during this week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it is appropriate to pray that all communities who follow Christ might be brought together into one Confession of Faith.

**OR** As the prophet Isaiah proclaims in the first reading, the Lord continues to remind us that we are his servants. We belong to the Lord and are called to shine his light on others. It is in this way that Christ's salvation may be revealed. Reflect this week on what it means to be a servant instead of a master; opening up our lives to others instead of controlling others' lives; and making daily choices that show care, compassion, and love for others.

3. ***"I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain on him."*** A dove is a popular image in Christianity to depict the Holy Spirit. But note that John did not say, "I saw a dove . . ." He said "I saw the Spirit . . ." A "spirit" is not visible to the human eye. It is discernible in the human heart and mind. John was aware that the Spirit of God was in Jesus. That Spirit did not come on Jesus and then depart. It remained. John called people to "repent" and baptized them with water as a sign they had been washed clean and could reform their lives. He knew that Jesus would baptize them, and us, with the Spirit that is in Him - the Spirit that would call and empower us to go beyond repentance and reform to seek the greatest good [the "magis"] that God desires and intends for us to achieve for ourselves and for others. The "magis" does not necessarily mean easy and pleasant. For Jesus, in whom the "Spirit remained" it involved torture and crucifixion. For us it will at least involve challenges and difficult choices. But if we allow the Spirit to be in us, we will achieve our "magis."

**OR** ***"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** Note that John says "sin of the world" and not "sins of the world." We all have free will and are capable of committing individual sins for which we must account and seek forgiveness. But what is the *sin* of the world? John observed a self-centeredness in the people of his day that is the opposite of being centered on God. John understood that such self-centeredness is at the heart of all sin in the world and recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God, the person who would sacrifice himself to help us root out self-centeredness and become centered on God. Jesus did that with his life and his teaching. But he needs our help. Because God has given us the great gift of free will we must choose to stop being centered on ourselves and choose to put God at the center of our lives. When we are centered on God we become a *person for others*. If everyone in the world becomes a *person for others* would there be any *sin of the world*?

**JANUARY 21/22, 2017**

**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. The watchword today is “immediately.” Peter and Andrew, James and John all respond immediately to the call of Christ. May I be as open to God’s call and as ready to use my talents in His service as those first disciples were!
2. Evangelization is an important theme in today’s readings. Jesus proclaims the Gospel in Galilee. St. Paul writes of being sent by Christ to preach the Gospel. Proclaiming the Good News by our daily pattern of living is key to Christian stewardship. As the practice of stewardship leads to evangelization, in what ways can we evangelize to friends, neighbors and even family members through our pattern of living?

**OR** In today’s Gospel, Jesus urges the crowd to reform their lives. Good stewards remain mindful that their lives are in constant need of reform. They realize the need to be liberated from those actions that keep them from enjoying a closer friendship with Jesus. What is in our lives that we need to reform? What keeps us from giving praise and glory to the Lord?

3. **“Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.”** The *Deadliest Catch* is a popular “reality” program. It features the men who fish for crabs in the frigid waters of the Bering Sea. The rough seas, cold weather and heavy equipment can be dangerous, and sometimes deadly. Fishing on the Sea of Galilee may not be as deadly but it was difficult and demanding. It may be understandable that when Jesus called Simon (called Peter), Andrew, James and John to leave their nets and become “fishers of men” they jumped at the chance. But they actually did not give up one to accept the other. They continued their livelihood of fishing the sea as they followed Jesus and learned from his words and example how to lead others to a greater awareness of the love of a great and generous God - to be “fishers of men.” Through his call to Peter and the others, Jesus calls us to learn from him to use all of the talents, abilities and gifts God has given us to be “fishers of men” - to lead others to Him. In many ways that can be more challenging than fishing for crabs in the Bering Sea.

**OR** **“Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.** Fishing is difficult work and can be very dangerous. Fishermen are a hearty group and tend to be very independent, but they are quick to come to the aid of someone in danger and are generous to people in need. Simon and his brother Andrew were partners with Zebedee and his sons James and John in the fishing trade they operated out of the small village of Capernaum on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus challenged them to “Come after me and I will make you fishers of men” they may have thought, “Gee, that has to be easier than fishing for fish.” Little did they know that the truth Jesus would reveal to them through his life and teachings would lead them into a life that was more difficult and dangerous than catching fish from the sea. By leaving their nets and becoming imitators of Jesus they challenge us to do likewise, to become *fishers of men*. Are we up to the challenge?

**JANUARY 28/29, 2017**

**Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1. Blessed are they who are what they are and do what they do *for the sake of the kingdom!* The Gospel today assures good stewards that their suffering and their service on behalf of the kingdom *will* be rewarded!
2. Jesus went up a mountain to preach a new way of living to his followers. He begins this “Sermon on the Mount” with a proclamation of the Beatitudes; lessons on discipleship and stewardship that continue to turn society’s values upside down. Living a life of Christian stewardship includes constantly re-examining our daily actions in light of the Beatitudes so that we may live more authentically as disciples of the Lord.  
**OR** In today’s Gospel, Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with a series of blessings, the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are a summary of the fundamental attitude of the Christian steward. Make it a point to reflect on this Gospel reading during the week. Identify the blessing with which you most identify. Which one is the most challenging for you?
3. **“Blessed are...” (Matthew 5:1-12)** The people gathered on a hillside on the northwestern side of the Sea of Galilee were probably surprised by the kinds of people Jesus described after saying “Blessed are...” But Jesus is describing characteristics that God intended for all of us to have. Imagine a world in which everyone is poor in spirit, rather than selfishly materialistic; mourns the pain and loss of others, rather than causes it; is meek, rather than proud and boastful; hungers for what is right, rather than ignores or tramples on the rights of others; shows mercy rather than seeks vengeance; has a pure heart, rather than seeks their own pleasure at the cost of others; makes peace rather than causes conflict; accepts rejection for doing what is right, rather than retaliates against those who do wrong; endures insults and persecution without bitterness, for imitating Jesus. If we all accepted the responsibility to be the person God created us to be, wouldn’t we be blessed?