

Readings for the Extraordinary Form – December 24th, Vigil of the Nativity

Romans 1: 1-6

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him, we have received the grace of apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles, among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Matth. 1: 18–21

Then Mary, the Mother of Jesus, 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.”

The Name of Jesus

Ave Maria Catholic Church, Sunday, December 24, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

Pope Benedict XVI said that his favorite season was Advent, or the pre-Christmas season. Among his family traditions, he remembered how his nativity scene grew by a few figures every year during Advent. In 1934, when he was just seven years old, during his preparation for Christmas, Joseph Ratzinger wrote a letter to the Baby Jesus that said: *“Dear Baby Jesus, soon you will descend to earth. You will bring joy to children and to me. I would like a missal [the Volks-Schott], a green chasuble, and a heart of Jesus. I always want to be good. Greetings from Joseph Ratzinger.”*

The young Joseph requested the missal that helped him to fall in love with the liturgy. He asked for a green chasuble that he used to play a parish priest’s game with his brother. Finally, he asked for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a special devotion of Ratzinger’s family. What impressive requests coming from a seven-year-old child!

We are nearing the completion of the Advent season. We were preparing our homes with the nativity scenes and Christmas decorations. Perhaps we have already made our requests to the Baby Jesus. If we did not, what should we ask for?

On the Vigil of the Nativity of the Lord, the Church invites us to ask through the collect prayer: *“O God, who makes us glad with the yearly expectation of our redemption, grant that we who now joyfully receive your only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, may also without fear behold Him coming as our Judge.”*

This prayer opens our hearts to the Church’s teaching that Jesus is our Savior, Jesus is our Redeemer, and Jesus will be our Judge.

First, Jesus is our Savior.

The name of Jesus was announced by the Angel and given to him by Joseph in his role as the head of the Holy Family. By this name, the child was known in his family and among his friends in Nazareth.

The crowds, the sick, and those in need looked for Him and invoked Him by his name. And his name revealed his mission. Jesus means “God saves.” In the message to Joseph, the meaning of the name is explained: “for he will save his people from their sins”.

Christ is the only Savior. Saint Peter proclaims: *“There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved,”* (Acts 4:12). Saint Paul also teaches that Jesus is the only mediator between God and men: *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men,*

the man Christ Jesus,” (1 Tm 2: 5- 6). Jesus is the perfect mediator who unites humanity with God, bringing us the good news of salvation.

Through the liturgy, the mysteries of our salvation are given to us. The sacred liturgy brings the mysteries of salvation closer to us. Through the liturgy, we participate in the expectation of the coming of the Lord, and we can also experience the joy of his coming.

Second, Jesus is our Redeemer.

Jesus’s name is also a sign of contradiction. In justification of his death sentence, His name was written on the Cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek: “*Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews,*” (Jn 19:19). The name of Jesus, in the supreme sacrifice of the Cross, shows God’s message of reconciliation and the definitive redemption from sins.

In his plan of redemption, God decreed that our reconciliation with Him would be obtained through the sacrificial act of His Son: “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him,*” (John 3: 16-17).

The Son of God, the Word, was made flesh and dwelt among us. He took our flesh to offer that very same flesh on the Cross. That was God’s loving plan of redemption. There was a terrible evil, the original sin of Adam and Eve. However, the love of God turns that evil into goodness through the sacrifice of Jesus. For this reason, the Sacred Liturgy sings: “*O happy fault . . . which gained us so great a Redeemer!*” (*Exsultet* at the Easter Vigil).

Finally, Jesus will be our Judge.

Jesus, our Redeemer, conquered sin and death for us through his Sacrifice on the Cross. We must remember Saint Paul’s instruction to the Philippians: “*[Jesus] humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,*” (Phil 2: 8-11).

It is also revealed that “*the Son of Man will come with his Father's glory . . . and he will repay each one according to his conduct*” (Mt 16:27), and that “*the Father . . . has assigned all judgment to the Son,*” (Jn 5:22).

Jesus, who is the Son of Man, is at the same time truly God and has the divine power to judge human works and consciences.

Jesus explains why he has the power to judge when He says: *“The Father himself judges no one, but has assigned all judgment to the Son, so that all men may honor the Son just as they honor the Father,”* (Jn 5:22-23).

The divine power to judge each and every one belongs to the Son of man. Now, the text of Matthew's Gospel emphasizes that Jesus will exercise this power in solidarity with every person: *“I was hungry, and you gave me food”* (Mt 25:35), or *“I was hungry, and you gave me no food”* (Mt 25:42). Jesus identifies himself with our neighbors: *“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”* (Mt 25:40); or *“Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me,”* (Mt 25:45).

Jesus judges because he loves and in view of love.

The young boy Joseph Ratzinger asked for his Christmas gifts: a missal, a green chasuble, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We must also ask for our Christmas gifts. Let us ask to recognize Jesus as our Savior through the Sacred Liturgy, to acknowledge Him as our Redeemer as we participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and to see Him as our Merciful Judge every time we contemplate the image of His Sacred Heart.