



Stronica Proboszcza

The Pastor's Page

December 23rd, MMXVIII

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Month of the Divine Infancy

Rev. Mark A. Borkowski

FmarkB@aol.com

Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus!
Praised be Jesus Christ!

The days of preparation are now becoming merely the hours of preparation before we come together in our beautiful parish church to solemnly commemorate and joyfully celebrate the incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May God reward those dear friends of Our Lady of the Scapular who spend hours preparing the church for the Christmas season. Although the celebration of Christmas in our homes also demands a great deal of time and work, and it is easy to “get behind” in our preparations, I strongly urge every parishioner to guard against letting any preparation or last minute detail prevent him or her from attending the celebration of the Holy Mass on this most sacred day. There is no detail or preparation more important than truly meeting the newborn Savior in the Eucharistic Celebration and Holy Communion. NO ONE should stay home from Mass “to get things ready” for the celebration!

The Christmas Mass IS THE CELEBRATION!

Sunday, December 23rd – the Feast of St. John Cantius

Born in 1390, John Cantius dedicated his life to teaching. A professor of theology for many years at the University of Kraków in Poland, he advised his students to “Fight false opinions, but let your weapons be patience, sweetness and love. Roughness is bad for your own soul and spoils the best cause.”

John was a country boy, born in the small town of Kanty in Poland. His parents sent him to study in Kraków, where he received his degree when he was only 19 years old. He was ordained a priest and became a lecturer at the university.

John spent most of his life there teaching about the scriptures. But even as a distinguished professor, John was a friend of the poor and was known to them because he shared everything he had. He kept only the money and clothes absolutely needed to support himself. He slept little, and then on the floor, ate sparingly, and took no meat. He lived very simply. In fact, on one occasion when he went to dine with rich people, the servants turned him away because his cassock was old and patched. He made four journeys to Rome, alone, on foot, carrying his luggage on his back.

One Christmas Eve in 1473, the whole town of Kraków went into mourning when news got around that John was dying. He comforted those around him when he saw them grieving. He was 83 years old. He is patron saint of Poland and Lithuania.

In 1902 the Polish parish of St. John Cantius was founded on the south west side of Detroit called Delray. This was an area of Detroit with a large Hungarian population. The Hungarian Catholic Parish of the

Holy Cross is located in Delray. The first pastor was Fr. Jan Walczak and the parish had an elementary school operated by the Felican sisters. The present church building was built in 1923 and is very beautiful in a neo Romanesque style. Unfortunately after over 100 years of service to the Polonia of Detroit, St. John Cantius parish was closed in October of 2007. Many holy relics from St. John Cantius Church can be found in our church.

Monday, December 24th – The Feast of Saints Adam & Eve!

It may come as a surprise, but Christmas Eve Day is the feast day of these two very important persons in salvation history! Probably for the most part we think of Adam and Eve as a couple of “bad guys” of the Old Testament, but the fact of the matter is God made them in His own image and likeness and God loved them very much! He said they were good like all of His creation and in fact they were the greatest of all His creation. Yes, they sinned, but we may understand from the fact that after their sin, God did not destroy them, that God forgave them. And it is our faith that those whose sins are forgiven return to the state of grace. Further, we have no reason to believe that Adam and Eve did anything else in their lives to merit the fires of Hell. And so all who are in Heaven are considered saints.

The name Adam in Hebrew means “of the ground,” fitting as the scriptures say he was made of dirt. The name Eve means “life giving,” Also fitting as she is the first mother of all humanity. The first children of Adam and Eve were Cain, Abel and Seth. Their feast day has been placed on the calendar the day before Christmas because of their relationship with Jesus and Mary. Jesus is sometimes thought of as the new Adam. As if somehow God did start over again and this “new man,” would never disappoint! And Mary would be the second mother of all humanity. Jesus made that idea very clear as He spoke from the cross to Mary and John. Christmas Eve is the night when everything is made new again and all humanity is perfected in the persons of the Jesus and Mary.

On December 24th we remember the sadness of Adam and Eve as they left paradise. It was once a custom on this day to toll church bells, as at a funeral. But at midnight the tolling stopped and the bells began to peal the good news: Christ is born! By the way, St. Adam is the patron saint of gardeners and St. Eve is the patron saint of tailors!

From Nazareth to Bethlehem

Mary and Joseph were compelled to make the long journey from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem after a census was proclaimed by Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor. Joseph hailed from Bethlehem in Judea, a town that dates back to 1400 B.C. The decree required citizens to register at their birthplaces.

The shortest route to Bethlehem was directly south through Samaria, but its hilly terrain would have proven particularly arduous for Mary, who was in the late stages of pregnancy. Other factors in avoiding that route were the hostile Samaritans in the region, who could have posed a threat to the two travelers, and the knowledge that it would be difficult for them to find lodgings.

It is believed that Mary and Joseph chose a safer and more comfortable route that took them southeast through the Jezreel Valley and further east to the Jordan Valley. Continuing south to Jehrico, they probably proceeded up through the Judean Desert to Jerusalem and onward to Bethlehem. By the end of their difficult trek, the couple would have walked more than 90 miles; much of that distance across difficult terrain.

Opinions differ on how many days it took Mary and Joseph to complete their epic journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Some scholars believe the trek lasted from four to seven days, while others cite the journey as lasting a week and a half. While Mary’s exact method of transportation is unknown, there are several theories based on what was in use at that time. Wealthy families tended to travel using chariots or horses, while poorer families traveled by donkey or on foot. Since Mary and Joseph were not able to find a place to stay in Bethlehem, they were probably a poorer family. It is quite possible Mary rode a donkey to Bethlehem.

Wednesday, December 26th – Feast of St. Steven, the First Martyr

St. Stephen was so sure of Jesus that he staked his life on Him. Stephen's powerful story is told in the sixth and seventh chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Stephen was a Greek-speaking Jew. When the apostles needed seven people to help them, he was the first person they chose. This was a sign that Stephen was trusted by everyone. We call him a "deacon," a word that means servant and helper. He had to be a person of integrity, because his job was to distribute funds to needy members of the community.

Stephen was the first martyr. The word "martyr" means "witness." The martyr's lives and deaths give witness to their faith. Stephen's name is the Greek word for "wreath." Famous athletes and military heroes and anyone who won a great victory were given leafy wreaths to wear like crowns on their heads. The martyrs often are shown wearing leafy crowns.

When we hang a Christmas wreath on our front door, we announce the victory of Jesus. We welcome the victory of peace, of love, of justice. And we remember deacon Stephen, the first witness to lay down his life for Christ.

Thursday, December 27th – the Feast of St. John the Apostle & Evangelist

St. John the Evangelist was the youngest of all the Apostles. Tradition says he was about eighteen years old when he became a disciple of Jesus. He was the younger brother of St. James and they were the sons of Zebedee the fisherman. Tradition claims Mary Salome as their mother. Jesus called both brothers to follow him. Immediately they left their nets and became Jesus' disciples. John and his brother sometimes misunderstood their role as disciples of Jesus. The Lord gently teased the two with the nickname "Sons of Thunder" because they once wanted to call down God's wrath on some people who mocked them. At another time they hoped to get the seats of honor next to Jesus when he came into his kingdom. Jesus explained to them that the way to the kingdom was through suffering.

Along with James and Peter, John was present when Jesus was transfigured in glory on Mount Tabor. These disciples were also with Jesus during the agony in the garden of Gethsemane. On Mount Calvary John was given charge and care of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the day Jesus died. Tradition suggests that during John's time together with Mary after her son's death, they often prayed together and even commemorated Christ by sharing together the Holy Eucharist.

St. John wrote the fourth gospel. In many ways his gospel is very different from the other three. Most of the stories in his gospel are not found in the other gospels. Also the stories are more poetic, which sometimes makes them harder to understand. Each story seems to have many different meanings. The symbol of St. John's gospel is the eagle who flies to the heights. Tradition says that St. John later became the bishop of Ephesus, in what is now Turkey. There he lived to be a very old man, calling the Christians in his care to love one another.

Friday, December 28th – the Feast of the Holy Innocents

The story of the Innocents is told in the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. Herod, the king of Judea, held the throne only because the Romans kept him there. Herod was bloodthirsty and had even murdered several members of his own family, including three of his sons. He would have no scruples about taking the lives of other people's children.

When the Magi told him about a newborn king, Herod ordered the death of all male babies in Bethlehem. In the meantime, Joseph, having been warned of the danger in a dream, fled with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. St. Matthew quotes the prophet Jeremiah to describe the sorrow of the mothers of Bethlehem: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation. It is Rachel weeping for her children, and she will not be consoled, because they are no more." Only a few days after one of the gladdest days on the Christian calendar, we remember one of the most tragic events told in the Bible. In every generation there will be innocent victims and their weeping mothers

Mary's Dream about Christmas

"I had a dream, Joseph. I do not understand it, not really, but I think it was about a birthday celebration for our son. I think that is what it was all about. The people had been preparing for it for about four weeks. They decorated the house and bought new clothes. They went shopping many times and bought elaborate gifts. It was peculiar, though, because the presents weren't for our son! They wrapped them in beautiful paper and tied them with lovely bows and stacked them under a tree. Yes, a tree, Joseph, right in their house! They decorated the tree also. The branches were full of glowing lights and sparkling ornaments. There was a figure on the top of the tree. It looked like an angel might look. Oh, it was beautiful! Everyone was happy and laughing. They were all excited about the gifts they gave each other, Joseph, but there were none for our son. I do not think they even knew him. They never mentioned his name.

It seems so odd for people to go through all that trouble to celebrate the birthday of someone they do not even know. I had the strangest feeling that if our son had gone to this celebration he would have been intruding. Everything was so beautiful, Joseph, and everyone so full of cheer, but it made me want to cry. How sad of Jesus not to be invited or wanted at his own birthday celebration. I'm so glad it was only a dream. How terrible it would have been, Joseph, if that was for real!"

The Poinsettia – the Mexican Flower of the Holy Night

Dr. Joel Poinsett was U.S. ambassador to Mexico in the early 1800's. In 1829 when he returned home, he brought with him a plant called by the Mexicans the *flower of the Holy Night*. We call it the poinsettia, after Joel, and use it as a favorite Christmas plant.

It has a fabled origin: Long ago, on Christmas Eve, a poor child made his way to church in great sadness because he had no gift to offer the Christ child. Not daring to enter the church, he knelt humbly on the ground outside and prayed, tearfully telling the Lord of his great desire to offer a gift. Unwilling to approach with empty hands, he finally rose only to behold springing up at his feet a plant with dazzling red, spectacular blooms. This was the answer to his prayers. These blossoms he took to the feet of the Christ child. Since then, the flower of the Holy Night spread through the whole country, blooming each year at Christmas with such glorious abandon that the very sight of it fills believers with the spirit of this season of the Savior's birth. In Poland the poinsettia is called *Gwiazda Betlejemska/the Star of Bethlehem*.

Stajenka, Szopka – The Stable, Żłóbek – The Manger

St. Francis of Assisi called it a crèche, the French word for cradle. He was the one who created the first crèche using real people, a real manger, a real ox and donkey. And real shepherds!

The Incarnation – Christmas – was a key component in the spirituality of St. Francis. He wanted to celebrate the Incarnation in a special way. He wanted to do something that would help people remember the Christ Child and what it was really like when He was born in Bethlehem.

St. Francis wanted people to see and to experience how Jesus lay in a manger with an ox and a donkey standing by – how He lay upon the hay where He had been placed.

It was Christmas Eve in the year 1223. At the appointed time, Franciscan Brothers came to the new Bethlehem. Men, women, and children from the area also came to celebrate. The torches they carried lit up the night as they approached the crèche. Once again shepherds were walking in the night to come and adore Him. All were filled with joy over the mystery of the Incarnation. And a great tradition began.

As you look upon your Nativity set, may you remember and celebrate again God's love for His creation. To show His abundant love, mercy, and forgiveness, He became a person like us. This is what the crèche symbolizes.

Oplátky – Christmas Wafers Available!

Polish Christmas wafers called oplátky are available from the ushers before or after Mass.

The Polish Oplátek

Chlebem pokoju niech Was Bóg obdarza,
Niech spieszy serca naszego zadatek,
Ten – u polskiego święcony ołtarza
– *polski oplátek!*

May God grant us the bread of peace,
Let our hearts hurry toward this gift,
Which has come to us from the altars of holy
Poland – *the Polish Oplátek!*

Chleba wytrwania niech Wam Bóg nie skąpi
Z nim zapał ojców i hart naszych matek
Niech w progi Wasze, w serca Wasze wstąpi
– *polski oplátek!*

God be generous to you with the bread of
perseverance from which our fathers drew
fervor and our mothers, fortitude. May this
bread be found in our homes and our hearts
– *the Polish Oplátek!*

Chlebem miłości niech Was Bóg bogaci,
Tę miłość siejcie w serca Wasych dziątek –
Te dziś życzenia niesie Wam od Nasz Księży
– *polski oplátek!*

May God make us rich with the bread of love.
Instill that love in the hearts of your families –
This greeting is brought to you today from
your priests together with
– *the Polish Oplátek!*

Rev. Mark Borkowski, Pastor
Rev. Canon Walter Ptak, Rev. Dariusz Strzałkowski, Rev. Thomas Puzio & Fr.
George Kowalski

Wigilia – the Polish Christmas Vigil Supper

The Christmas Eve Supper in a Polish household is called Wigilia. It is a traditional feast which does not include any meat dishes because it is the last day of Advent and traditionally a day of abstinence. But is also the eve of great anticipation – the time when God became like us – when Heaven touched earth with great power. So abstinence is observed – but the meatless meal is festive and bountiful! At least seven courses are included and often as many as eleven or fifteen courses are served!

Another requirement for the Wigilia Supper is that the menu should represent the produce of all the farmer's land and industry and all the sources of God's goodness should be represented. Most often there are delicately flavored mushrooms from the woods, fine wheat or millet from the fields, sweet apples or plums from the orchard, tasty potatoes, cabbage and beets from the kitchen garden and herring and pike to symbolize the waters. It is important to at least try or sample from every dish in gratitude to God for His kindness and bounty. Not to do so would imply disrespect for God and His mercy!

A typical seven course menu for the rites of Wigilia might include: 1. Herring and marinated mushrooms with rye bread. 2. Clear barszcz (beet soup) and mushroom filled uszka (dumplings). 3. Broiled Pike with horseradish sause. 4. Cabbage soup with boiled potatoes and onions. 5. Pierogi filled with cabbage, potatoes, cheese or sweet fruit or berries. 6. Fruit compote. 7. Pastries made with poppy seeds, honey, ginger and nuts.