

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent – December 23, 2007

### *LESSON: The Call to Be a Christian*

Amidst all the **activities** that **swirl around** these final days before Christmas, the Church wants to make sure that we don't forget the **real meaning** of this great Christian holiday.

Christmas is the anniversary of the **birth of Jesus Christ**, the day when we celebrate the "**Mass**" of "**Christ's**" birth - Christ-Mass.



at baptism.

- ? The **exchange of gifts** that we are getting ready for, the time that we will be spending with **family and friends** - these are good things, **good ways to celebrate**.
- ? Exchanging gifts reminds us that on Christmas God gave us his **greatest gift**, our **Savior**.
- ? Spending time with family members reminds us that the **result** of that gift was our **salvation**, which consists in our **adoption into God's family** through the grace we received

This is the **heart** of what Christmas is all about. But it is not just something that happened in the **past**. Through the **Church** and the **sacraments**, Christ has wanted to **stay with** his newly adopted family **all throughout history**.

In a sense, **every Mass** is a **new Bethlehem**, a new **coming of Christ** among us. And every day he **renews** his **invitation to us**, the invitation he brought when he arrived on earth that on the first Christmas night.

What is that invitation?

- ? St Paul described it well in the Second Reading.
- ? He wrote that a **Christian** is someone who is "**called to belong to Jesus Christ**" and "**called to be holy**."
- ? Christ **comes** at Christmas, but he doesn't come **passively** - he comes to **save** us, to **call** us out of a **self-centered** life and into a **Christ-centered** life.



That's what it means to "belong to Jesus Christ" and "to be holy." And that's exactly what **all** of us are called to.

### *ILLUSTRATION: Water into Wine at the Offertory*

Living a Christ-centered life means dedicating ourselves to **Christ's priorities** - and his highest priority is **building up his Kingdom**, the **Church**.

- ? In a sense, we could say that Christ has chosen to **limit his omnipotence** in order to **involve** us in his work of salvation, to give us an **active role** in building up his Kingdom.
- ? This is why he **became a man** on Christmas Day - because he wanted **us** to be able to **become sons and daughters of God, co-workers of his Kingdom.**
- ? He came to share in our **humanity**, so that we could share in his **divinity.**

This is **symbolized** every time we celebrate Mass.

- ? During the **offering** of the bread and wine, the priest pours a **few drops of water** into the **chalice full of wine.**



- ? Those few drops of water get **absorbed into the wine**, and then together, with the words of **consecration**, they are **transubstantiated** into the **blood of Christ.**
- ? The **water** is like our **human nature**, and the **wine** is like the **divine** nature.
- ? The water is **taken up into** the wine, just as, through Christ's grace and incarnation, our human nature is **taken up into God.**

## ***APPLICATION: The Obedience of Faith***

This is what we are **called** to, what Christ came to **invite** us to.

But how exactly do we **respond** to this invitation? It didn't come in the mail with a self-addressed return envelope.

The invitation is issued to our **hearts**, and so the only way we can **respond** is in our **hearts.**

- ? In the Second Reading St Paul describes the **key quality** of a **healthy Christian heart.** He calls it the "**obedience of faith.**"
- ? If Christ is our **Lord**, if we are his **followers**, if we are **Christians**, then we will **believe** in him and show the **firmness** of that belief by **obeying** him.
- ? He is our **King**; we are his **subjects**; we **follow** his law.

This is what **St Joseph** did: as soon as God made his will clear through the message of the angel, **Joseph simply obeyed.**

- ? There is **no way** that he could have **understood fully** the supernatural nature of Mary's pregnancy.
- ? The angel didn't **give** a full explanation. He just said that **God was behind it**, and then told Joseph to **take** Mary into his home and **name** the child Jesus.
- ? Joseph could have **demand**ed a **more detailed explanation.** He knew that **gossip** would spread; his **reputation** was at stake.



- ? But those worldly concerns faded away as soon as **God's will** became clear.
- ? Joseph **believed** in God, and so he **fulfilled** God's will. That's the "**obedience of faith.**"

That's how we can continue to respond to God's invitation in our life - through obeying his will, as made clear

- ? through official Church **teaching,**
- ? through the **commandments,**
- ? or through the quiet **voice of conscience.**

Whatever God is asking **each one** of us today, let's not leave this Church without **saying yes.**

Let's go into Christmas this year well-prepared to receive Christ, with our **hearts warmed up** through **the obedience of faith.**