

# Growing in FAITH™

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

December 2020

**Gathered in Christ's Love**

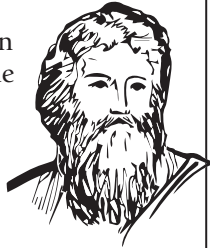
Fr. Richard Piontkowski, Pastor

## One Minute Meditations

### Holiday advice

The holiday season is an important time in the Church

but, in the midst of a pandemic, it can also be a time when health worries, money worries, family worries, and every kind of worry intrudes. Instead, try to follow this advice from St. Paul, *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."* (Philippians 4:8).



### Unborn joy

*"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb ..."* (Luke 1:40). Even in the womb, John was filled with joy to serve God. With the coming of Christmas, look for ways to do God's will and then leap for joy as you fulfill His plan.

*"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21).



## God is love

We call God "Creator," "Savior," "Father," yet when we really want to understand who He is, one word is enough. God is love.

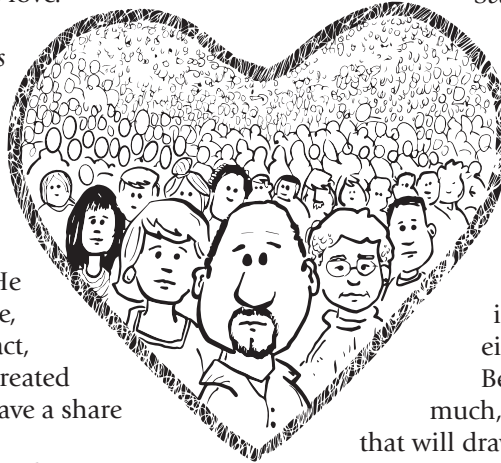
*"Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love."* (1 John 4:-8). Love is the very nature and essence of God Himself. He doesn't just love, He is love. In fact, that's why He created us, so we can have a share in that love.

We are not simply swept up in the good will God has toward all his creations. He loves each of us as individuals and that love is never-ending and unconditional. *"Can*

*a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.*

*See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name"* (Isaiah 49:15-16). This is not necessarily because we are good; we can't possibly earn the vast love He has for us. But the good news is we can't lose it either.

Because He loves us so much, He denies us nothing that will draw us closer to him and to life in Heaven. *"For God so loved the world,"* Jesus declared, *"that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).



## Why Do Catholics Do That?

### Why do Catholics believe in a "virgin birth?"

Before Jesus was born, Isaiah was told, *"the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14). The virgin birth was documented in Luke 1:34.

Had Jesus been conceived like the rest of

us, He could not have been a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

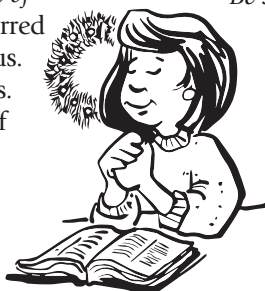
*"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).



# Awaken to the presence of God on Christmas morning

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).* An amazing truth occurred at the first Christmas; God came and lived among us. Even more amazing, He continues to live among us. During Advent, take steps to become more aware of His presence.

**Begin each day in his presence.** Before you get out of bed in the morning, place yourself in His presence. Take a few minutes to focus on a sacred picture or an image that will help you to



*"Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).*

**Seek God's Word.** Start your day with Scripture such as the daily Mass readings (found on [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)) or another reading you choose. Ask God to teach you during the day from that selection.

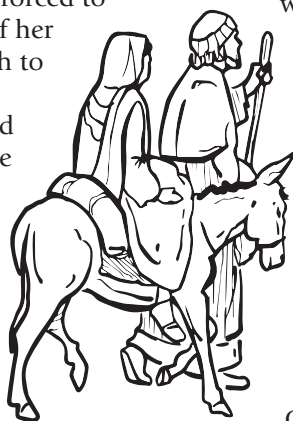
**Speak to him throughout the day.** Picture the Lord next to you throughout your day and talk with Him as you experience the day together. Brother

Lawrence, a 17th century monk, suggested prayer shouldn't be confined to formal times.

## from Scripture

**Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23, God chooses each of us in a special way.**

Mary and Joseph were forced to travel in the last stages of her pregnancy from Nazareth to Bethlehem. On foot or donkey, it was a dirty and exhausting journey. Once there, they had no option for decent housing and had to stay in a stable with animals. Young Mary gave birth in crude conditions with no friend or family to help.



After a short time, they fled to Egypt with their newborn to escape threats from the government, and stayed there for several years. There

were no friendly faces to greet the family once they arrived and they had to make their own way in an unfamiliar land.

Refugees all over the world flee violence like the Holy Family. Catholics have a special charge to protect them and those who are vulnerable:

children, elderly, and poor.

Like Mary's and Joseph's, God has a special place for each of us in his plan of salvation. Prayerfully ask God what he wants you to do for him and his kingdom.

## Q & A How do Catholics benefit from praying the Rosary?

The Rosary is a simple prayer adapted from the complex prayers of medieval monks. It's a powerful prayer because in it, we ask Mary—whose prayers are never refused—to pray for us. In addition, the



mysteries of the Rosary introduce us to the lives of Jesus and Mary. Each mystery is associated with a fruit. For example, the fruit of the mystery of the Annunciation is humility. Praying the

Rosary opens us to the graces to be more Christ-like.

A prayer with roots in Scripture, the Rosary begins with the Apostles' Creed, which summarizes the great mysteries of the Catholic Faith. The Our Father that introduces each mystery is from the Gospels. The first part of the Hail Mary that follows is from the angel's words announcing Christ's birth and Elizabeth's greeting to Mary. St. Pius V officially added the second part of the Hail Mary.

The repetition in the Rosary is meant to lead one into restful and contemplative prayer related to each Mystery. The gentle repetition of the words helps us to enter into the silence of our hearts, where Christ's spirit dwells. The Rosary can be said privately or with a group.

## Feasts & Celebrations

**Dec. 14 – St. John of the Cross (1591).** As a Carmelite, St. John led a reform in the Order to encourage more prayer and simplicity. Briefly jailed over a misunderstanding, some of his best spiritual writing came from this experience.

**Dec. 21 – St. Peter Canisius (1597).** Born in Holland, he was ordained into the Society of Jesus and vigorously safeguarded the Catholic faith through writings and teaching. His work, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is still used today.

**Dec. 26 – St. Stephen (first century).** A deacon of the early Church, St. Stephen preached that God can be found everywhere, not just in one place like the temple. He angered the Jewish authorities and became the first martyr of the Catholic Church.

**Dec. 27 – The Holy Family (1st century).** On the feast of the Holy Family, we celebrate the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. By their love and support of one another the Holy Family is a model for all Christian families.



## Our Mission

To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

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