



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
OF CHARLESTON

SECRETARIAT OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Homily Helps: Month of Christmas, Advent

1. Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception – Dec. 8

- The Catholic Church teaches that Mary, mother of Jesus, was free of original sin from the moment of her conception. While this belief was known in the early Church, it became official dogma in Pius IX's papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus* in 1854.
- Early Church fathers referred to Our Lady as the "New Eve." Jesus referred to his mother as "woman," the sinless counterpart to our ancestor Eve who ate from the tree of knowledge.
- Where Eve rejected God's plan, Mary embraced it, and through her participation Jesus Christ was born. Christ, the New Adam, came to open the gates of paradise for humanity, once shut by the original sin of Adam.
- The early fathers also conferred on Mary the title *Theotokos*, literally "God-bearer." It was implied and understood that Mary had been set aside in holiness to give birth to the Son of God.
- Due to her participation in God's plan, and her sinless humanity, she is the perfect mediatrix, our advocate in the sight of God.
- Let us pray for her intercession and for her protection, especially in the face of temptation.

2. Our Lady of Guadalupe: Patroness of the Unborn – Dec. 12

- Our Lady of appeared to Juan Diego in the winter of 1531 near modern day Mexico City.
- She asked that a chapel be built on Tepeyac Hill, and as proof of her identity, performed a miracle. She produced out of season roses native to Castile, Spain, and imprinted an image on St. Juan Diego's tilma, or cloak.
- Our Lady of Guadalupe is known as the patroness of the unborn, but why is this? She came in the form of an Aztec woman. In that culture, pregnant women would wear black sashes around their waist to denote that they were expecting.
- This is the only known/confirmed Marian apparition in which she was pregnant with the Christ Child.
- Let us pray for the intercession our Lady of Guadalupe, that she might bring all her spiritual children closer to the Son she bore in her womb.

3. Generosity over consumerism – *before Christmas*

- Jesus came into the world to give of Himself. Every Christmas season, we are called to do the same.
- While it is easy for us to give during periods of festivity, giving is most meritorious when we are uncomfortable and when we don't feel like it.
- This time of year, we can get caught up in the hustle when products are heavily marketed to us everywhere we turn (radio, television, social media, the grocery store), and sometimes we limit our vision to the “things” that Christmas brings.
- Let us restore Christ as the center of the season. This can best be done by going to Mass, preferably with your families.
- In the Mass, we receive the gift of the Eucharist, Christ's body and blood. In this bread and wine, we find our fullness, and this is the gift that truly can satisfy us.

4. The Last Gospel (John 1:1-14) – *Dec. 25*

- In the Gospel of John, Christ is described as the Word made Flesh and the Light. He came to draw us out of sin and restore our life with the Father.
- Christ is the Word. He is the ultimate messenger of the Father's love for each of us. Jesus came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, and He draws us each to have a dialogue (prayer) with the One who loves us most.
- In this Gospel, we are told that the darkness, the world, rejected Christ. We are given a task to restore light as instruments of the Word.
- We are called to be bearers of the Good News in imitation of Him, allowing the Word to work through us as His instruments.
- The Word was made flesh still dwells among us in the sacrament of the Eucharist. In it, we find communion with God's mystical body, the Church. Partaking in this sacrament worthily draws us into His family.

5. Eucharistic connection to Christmas

- In a way, every Mass is like Christmas. When Jesus was born, he was laid in a manger, a food trough for animals.
- This was a foreshadowing of the institution of the Eucharist, and the offering of Christ's body and blood on the cross.
- He was born in a town called Bethlehem, which literally translates to “House of Bread.”
- John 6:35, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.”
- When we look at the Eucharist, we often contemplate the crucifixion, but we should also think on His birth.

6. Feast of the Holy Innocents – Dec. 28

- This feast commemorates the children that were killed at the hands of King Herod in his attempt to kill Jesus, the King of the Jews, in infancy.
- Today, we celebrate the feast for all victims of murder.
- In today's world, we especially keep in mind the unborn whose lives prematurely ended due to abortion, and immigrant children who await refuge.
- This feast is a call to action to preserve life in all its stages. We are called to imitate those who defended their children in the Gospel, and the Magi who refused to give in to Herod's schemes.
- We can spreading awareness of human dignity in our communities, praying for conversion of hearts, and voting for laws that advocate for the common good and the lives of those around us.

7. Feast of the Holy Family – Dec. 30

- The Feast of the Holy Family is when we contemplate and commemorate the family life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. What would their lives have been like? Not much is written of Christ's childhood, but there is a lot that can be inferred in the Gospels.
- Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived a quiet, steady life among other extended family members. Jesus took up the trade of his father under his apprenticeship as a carpenter.
- Mary and Joseph were tasked with raising and protecting Jesus in his youth. They safeguarded the Word Made Flesh as he truly lived among them. As author Father Donald Calloway, MIC, pointed out, the apostles were only with Jesus for three years; St. Joseph lived with him for 30! "When you see Jesus, you are seeing Joseph: like father, like son," Father Calloway said.
- How can we emulate the Holy Family? We need first to pray so that we are in communication with God, giver of all good things. We must first be able to communicate with others to love them.
- In our own homes, that could be putting away distractions when someone is speaking to us or going out of our way to ask about someone's day.
- We need also to sacrifice to keep the balance within our families. Every member of a family has a role to play in everyday life. By carrying out our tasks consistently and virtuously, and with the Holy Family's intercession, we can model our home lives after them.