



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
**DIOCESE**  
**OF CHARLESTON**

SECRETARIAT OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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## *Homily Helps*

### **1. Month of the Holy Family – February**

- The month 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 much 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 balance within our families. Every member of a family has a role to play in daily life. By carrying out our tasks consistently and virtuously, and with the Holy Family's intercession, we can model our home lives after them.

### **2. Feast of the Presentation – Feb. 2**

- Today, the Church celebrates the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, which occurs 40 days after the celebration of the birth of Jesus. It is also known as Candlemas due to traditions stemming from the Middle Ages.
- The Presentation of the Lord concludes the celebration of the Nativity, pointing us to Easter with the offerings of Mary and the prophecy of Simeon.
- Jesus was presented in the Temple by his Blessed Mother and his earthly father. This is another "epiphany celebration," since the Christ child is revealed as the Messiah through the canticle and words of Simeon and the testimony of Anna the prophetess.
- Jesus' presentation in the Temple reflects how he fulfills the Old Covenant. According to Old Testament law, a sacrifice had to be offered in the Temple when a child was consecrated to the Lord. Mary and Joseph honored this tradition, as Luke 2:22-24 reads: "Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord..."
- Simeon was a devout and upright man. He was told by the Lord that before dying, he would meet the Messiah. When Jesus is brought to the Temple, we see the fulfillment of

this prophecy. “Simeon and Anna: a man and a woman, representatives of the Old Covenant, who, in a certain sense, had lived their whole lives for the moment” (St. John Paul II), recognize Jesus’ lordship as Messiah in this culmination of their watchful waiting. When Simeon receives Jesus, he blesses him and prophesies Jesus’ future as savior, proclaiming him the light of the world.

- “God enters the temple not as a powerful ruler but as a little child in his Mother’s arms. The King of glory comes not with a show of human force and power, not with a great fanfare and noise, not causing fright and destruction. He comes into the temple as he came into the world, as an infant in silence, in poverty, and in the company of the poor and the wise” (homily of St. John Paul II, Mass in Delhi and Agra, Feb. 2, 1986).
- Mary and Joseph presented their infant to God in obedience. Ultimately, they knew *who* Jesus was and *whose* he was.

### 3. St. Valentine – Feb. 14

- In the early martyrologies, three different saints named Valentine are mentioned, all sharing Feb. 14 as a feast day.
- One St. Valentine was arrested, condemned to death for his faith, beaten with clubs, and finally beheaded on Feb. 14, 270. Pope Julius I (333-356) built a basilica at the site which preserved St. Valentine’s tomb. His relics were transferred to the Church of St. Praxedes near the Basilica of St. Mary Major.
- In 1969, the Roman Catholic Church removed St. Valentine from the General Roman Calendar, because so little is known about him. However, the Church still recognizes him as a saint, listing him in the Roman Martyrology.
- Another St. Valentine was the former Bishop of Terni, Narnia and Amelia. He was on house arrest with Judge Asterius for performing marriages for Christian couples and attempting to convert Claudius II. He discovered that his captor’s daughter was blind, and praying for her, she was healed. Judge Asterius and his family converted, and he released Valentine. When he was recaptured, the saint was beheaded outside of the gates of Rome.
- Even if apocryphal, we can learn from the stories of the early Church martyrs. Many saints were willing to sacrifice for the good of those who meant them harm. They gave their lives in service to others, and act as inspiration for us to give of ourselves without fear as witnesses to truth, goodness and beauty of the Lord. Let us pray for the intercessions of all martyrs, named and unnamed, and aspire to receive the virtues they exemplified in life.

### 4. Pope Benedict XVI on sacrifice (*Lenten reflection*) – Feb. 22

- “The world offers you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.” In this statement, Pope Benedict XVI referred to our ultimate call as described in the Baltimore Catechism. We were made to know, love and serve God in this world and be happy with him in the next.
- The quote draws our attention to this reality: often, doing the things that we were created to do causes discomfort, while complacency offers comfort. Christ calls us to follow him on his road to Calvary, to imitate him in every aspect of our lives. Though

we are imperfect, our true attempts to keep the commandments and offer our all to God and neighbor is pleasing to him.

- God allows suffering to purify us. When we offer the difficulties of this life to God as a gift, we allow grace to guide our lives.
- Pope Benedict also stated: “When a person is conquered by the fire of His gaze, no sacrifice seems too great to follow Him and give Him the best of ourselves.”
- This is how we should approach all things — acting in love for others to the glory of the One who created the world for us to enjoy and govern.

## **5. Role of prayer, fasting and almsgiving for a good Lent – Feb. 22**

- During Lent, we are called to deny ourselves and foster virtue. We are called to create habits that improve our spiritual lives and increase our love for God and neighbor through prayer, fasting and giving.
- *In prayer*, we are united with our Creator. It is necessary for us to pray, for through prayer we learn about God’s will in our lives. This Lent, think about how you can add to your prayer life. Perhaps, when you get home, you are accustomed to immediately turning on the TV. Consider saying a quick Hail Mary during the intermittent times between activities or pray the rosary during your daily commute and always, make time for the frequent reception of the sacraments.
- *In fasting*, we deny our bodies of food, and it gives us two-fold benefits: spiritual and physical. When we fast, we purposefully take on discomfort for the sake of our souls, and the souls for whom we offer our sacrifices. Fasting helps us recognize our reliance on God, and our finite, limited nature. Some scientific findings have also discussed the medical benefit of fasting (weight loss and the health of the dopamine receptors of the brain, as a few examples).
- *In almsgiving*, we remember the parable of the poor widow in the Gospel of Mark (12:40-44), in which Jesus describes a woman giving away her only coins to the Temple’s treasury. Like her, we are called to give not only of our money, but also our time and resources to benefit those who are most in need. “A life without generosity, without giving of ourselves for another, is a dead life,” Bishop Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS, said (homily at the memorial Mass for Pope Benedict XVI).