



Stronica Proboszcza

The Pastor's Page

December 9th, MMXVIII

Second Sunday of Advent

Month of the Divine Infancy

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Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus!
Praised be Jesus Christ!

Today we light the "Bethlehem" candle on the Advent wreath. You may not be aware that the four candles on the Advent wreath have names. Not only do they stand for the four weeks of the Holy Season of Advent, which themselves stand for the four-thousand years Israel waited in darkness for the Messiah, but also the four candles are reminders of integral parts of the story of the Savior's birth. Last week's candle was the "Prophets" candle. The prophets were those wise men and women who kept constantly reminding God's People that their God would be faithful and keep His promise to send a Redeemer. Frequently they were ignored and sometimes even hated but they kept shouting out *'Our God is faithful! He will keep His promises!'*

Today's candle, the "Bethlehem" candle is a reminder of that humble, almost forgotten little town, where God became Man! The Prophet Micah foretold that the Christ Child would be born in the 'House of Bread' which is the literal translation of the name Bethlehem. When we think of Bethlehem this weekend we cannot help but remember how inhospitable its residents were toward Mary & Joseph and the most holy life carried into their town boundaries in the womb of the Virgin. We must not be so inhospitable to Christ when he comes to us unrecognizably today.

Next Sunday, "Rose Sunday" we will light the "Shepherds" candle and be inspired to think that the Christ showed Himself to the poorest of the poor first after His humble birth. And finally, the last candle to be lit will be the "Angels" candle. Angels are heavenly messengers who communicate good news from God our Heavenly Father wherever they go. The Good News of Christmas was some of the best news the angels ever brought down to us from heaven. Even though we don't sport a pair of fluffy white wings or wear a halo on our heads there's no reason we shouldn't be repeating this joyful message ourselves wherever we go!

Monday, December 10th – Feast of Our Lady of Loreto

The Basilica of the Holy House in Loreto is one of the most famous Marian shrines in the world, for, according to legend, inside is Mary's actual home, transported miraculously from Nazareth to this spot.

As the story relates, on May 10th, 1291, angels carried the house to the area of Trsat, Croatia, to preserve it from desecration when the Christian forces were defeated in the last Crusade. The

house remained there until December 10th, 1294, when some shepherds near Recanati, Italy, observed a structure moving across the sea and marked its resting spot nearby. There it remained for a short time before angels moved it twice more, to Lecanati, Italy, and then to Loreto, on the eastern coast.

The house that appeared on the hill in Loreto had a single door and one small window. Inside were an altar, a hearth and a statue of the Blessed Mother. There was no foundation. Immediately, large numbers of pilgrims came to venerate the house and offer prayers of intercession to Mary, who in 1296, as the story goes, identified the home as hers to a nearby hermit. That same year local officials dispatched to Palestine sixteen reputable citizens, who returned with the news that the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth contained only a foundation: the home itself was missing. Further, the dimensions of the foundation were said to match exactly the size of the house in Loreto; the stones of the house appeared to be the same type as found in the foundation; and crosses carved into the foundation were described as identical to those marked in the house. The conclusion was that the house was indeed Mary's home, miraculously transported across the sea.

Thus identified, the Holy House of Loreto became one of Christianity's most sacred sanctuaries, venerated because Mary would have been conceived and born within its walls. She would have accepted God's invitation to become Mother of God in this house and would have raised Jesus here, too. Whether the legend is true or not, over the centuries Our Lady of Loreto has provided both physical cures and spiritual assistance. Among those who have sought her aid are forty popes and two hundred saints and blessed, including Saints Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Alphonsus de'Ligouri and Therese of Lisieux.

The Litany of Loreto, a long prayer of entreaty to several dozen of Mary's titles, first appeared in 1578. In 1587 Pope Sixtus V granted an indulgence for its recitation. Pope Paul V in 1613 ordered the litany sung on Saturdays and on our Lady's feasts and feast eves. A church was constructed to enclose the Holy House in 1468; it was made a cathedral in 1586 and a basilica in 1728. A fire in 1921 destroyed the original statue of our Lady; Pope Pius XI crowned the new statue himself.

Modern research into contemporaneous documents has cast doubt upon the veracity of the stories recounting the house's origins. Many scholars now suspect that a miracle-working statue might have been brought from Trsat and housed in a chapel that already existed at Loreto and that confusion of facts gave rise to the legend about the miraculous transportation. Yet even if the Holy House of Loreto is not actually the home of the Blessed Mother, pilgrims can still meditate upon her spirit of *fiat* there, for Our Lady of Loreto continues to inspire people to heed the Lord's call to holiness.

Please Make a Contribution to the Annual Collection for Retired Religious

This weekend envelopes are being distributed for the annual collection for retired religious that we be taken up next weekend. I want to remind our parishioners, especially those that attended our parish schools once upon a time, or Catholic schools anywhere, that justice demands we care for these women religious in their old age. The world has changed so dramatically since these elderly religious made their gift of self to God, that the planned for method of caring for them in their golden years just will not work. Let me remind you of how it worked in the "*good old days*."

A young girl discerned a call from God to serve Him by becoming a religious. She went away to the convent with many other young girls from her neighborhood and city. They joined a

large group of sisters and were trained in the life and work of the order at the motherhouse with hundreds of other sisters around them. Next they were sent to the apostolate, usually the parish school where there were hundreds of young Catholic children to educate in the faith first, and then in reading, writing, arithmetic, etc... Families were big and did not have a lot of money for school tuition. Parishes did not pay school teaching sisters the wages they deserved for their services for many reasons.

One reason was that the sisters looked on their work as ministry, an apostolate for Christ. They performed enormous acts of charity. Parishes were as poor as their people and could not afford to pay. The sisters were content with the basics, room and board and the kindness and charity of the parishioners. Sisters worked hard because they knew some day they would be able to retire and go to the motherhouse and rest. They could do that as long as girls kept coming to become nuns and to replace them in the "*work force*." The little money the working sisters did receive went to the mother house to support the retired sisters. Everything was going okay. No one lived a luxurious life but all were provided for and they trusted in Divine Providence.

And then... everything changed! Smaller families with less children for Catholic Schools. Less and less young women entered the convent. Sisters grew older and there was no one to replace them in the apostolate. Catholic schools charged higher tuition because they needed to pay lay teachers a decent wage, not like the sisters accepted! Now we've got a big problem. Sisters who worked their whole life performing extremely important duties like educating thousands of Catholic children. Now they are too old to work themselves and there's no one to replace them and worse there is not enough money to support the older sisters. Should they now finish their lives of service to the church in poverty? **NO!** Those who benefited from their life's work should now support them comfortably until they pass to the next life. Our offerings to this collection now will make up for the wages our parents weren't able to pay them when they worked in our parish school.

Please do what is just and right and please, be generous.

A Polish Advent Custom – Roraty

A traditional Polish observance of the season of Advent differs greatly from the heavily commercialized time before Christmas in this country. It is a time of reflection and spiritual preparation for the coming of Christ at Christmas. The word advent comes from the Latin *adventus* which means *the coming*. We await the coming of the Messiah not only in the flesh but also for His second coming as Judge at the end of the world. Hope is the dominant characteristic of the season of Advent. There is a focus during the season on our longing for God's grace and His friendship. It is understood that parties, weddings, and other boisterous events would be an obstacle to the search for God's grace and building that friendship, and so they are avoided. Advent is also a time for reconciliation with God through the Sacrament of Penance.

Throughout advent many people in Poland participate in an early morning Mass called Roraty. It begins just before sunrise in almost complete darkness in the church. The name roraty comes from the ancient Latin chant that is sung to begin the service: *Rorate Coeli, de super; et nubes pluant justum* – O Heavens, drop down your dew from on high and may the Just One be rained by the clouds. The words of the ancient hymn are a plea for God's gift of His Son. As the hymn is sung candles are gradually lit in the dark church. Roraty is a kind of daily Advent vigil ceremony. The people wait in darkness not only for the rising of the sun but ultimately for the return of the Son of God, so beautifully symbolized by dawn's first light.

The roraty service has a definite Marian dimension to it as does the entire season of Advent. In the sanctuary is found one special candle that is more predominate than the others used in the ceremony. It is traditionally decorated with greenery and white ribbon in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who plays an important role in the raining down of the Just One.

The Advent roraty ceremony originated in the 13th century during the reign of King Bolesław Wstydlivy (the Bashful), who was the husband of St. Kinga. According to historical documents, a representative of every social state lit one candle of a specially prepared seven-branch candelabrum in the cathedral at the early morning service, starting with the King. As each man lit his candle he proclaimed: Paratus sum ad adventum Domini/ Gotów jestem na przyjście Pana – I am ready for the coming of the Lord! After the king lit his candle he was followed by the cardinal primate, then a senator, a nobleman, a knight, a townsman and finally the seventh candle was lit by a peasant farmer.

Preparation for the Lord's coming, both interior and spiritual, as well as exterior and temporal, is an integral part of a truly Catholic observance of the holy season of Advent.

Wednesday, December 12th – Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Every year pilgrims stream to a great church near Mexico City. There, over the altar, is a simple tilma (a cloak) made from two pieces of cactus cloth. Though that kind of cloth seldom lasts 20 years, this tilma has survived intact for centuries.

In 1531, the tilma belonged to Blessed Juan Diego, an Aztec Indian. Juan had been baptized a Christian after the Spanish invaded Mexico. One December morning he was walking past an old shrine of the Aztec goddess of the corn harvest. The Spanish had smashed the shrine and renamed the place Guadalupe. There Juan saw a vision of Mary, the Mother of God. She was dressed as an Aztec princess. She had olive skin and black hair like an Aztec. She was clothed in magnificent colors. Around her waist was a sash, which women wore when they were pregnant.

Mary spoke to Juan with affection. She gave him a message for the local bishop. Mary wanted the bishop to build a church where she stood. She promised to grant help to all who would call on her there.

When Juan Diego delivered the message, the bishop didn't believe him. Mary provided John with a sign to take to the bishop. She guided Juan to a spot where wild roses were blooming. He was amazed to see roses in winter.

Juan Diego gathered an armful of the flowers into his cloak and hurried off to show them to the bishop. But when he opened his tilma in the bishop's house, an even more amazing sign had been provided. Somehow the image of Mary, just as she looked when she appeared to Juan, filled the tilma.

Only 12 years before, the Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés had first made contact with the Aztecs. He and his soldiers were Christian, but the Aztecs didn't want to be like them. The Christians were brutal and greedy. They had brought great suffering to the native people and had shown particular cruelty toward Aztec women.

The Mother of God brought a much brighter message, one of hope and compassion. Her appearance was a rebuke to the Spanish and a consolation to the poor. She brought new dignity to the Aztec people, especially to the women. In the seven years following her appearances, eight million Aztecs were baptized.

Since then many miracles have been credited to her. Peace treaties have been signed in the church built in her honor. She is the patron of Mexico. She is honored throughout the Americas and all over the world.