

Men of Saint Michael

“Iron sharpens iron, as one man sharpens another”

Proverbs 27:17.



Newsletter



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Advent: Preparing for Christ's Coming

Raymond L. Cardinal Burke

Advent: Time of Consolation and Encouragement

We begin a new Liturgical Year with the celebration of the First Sunday of Advent. Fittingly, we begin the Church Year with four Sundays of preparation for Christmas, the celebration of the great mystery of the Incarnation. The two principal celebrations of the mystery of the Incarnation are the Solemnity of the Annunciation (March 25), in which we recall the conception of God the Son in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit; and the Solemnity of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ (December 25).

Advent means literally coming or arrival, namely, the coming or arrival of God into our midst with the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son made man. In truth, Christ first arrived in our midst at the moment of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, at the Annunciation. At Christmas, we celebrate the first fruit of His conception, His Birth at Bethlehem.

The Advent Season is a time of great consolation and encouragement for us. It is a time of consolation, for it reminds us of how much God loves us. God loves us so much that He has made His home with us first at Bethlehem and now in the Church. It is a time of great encouragement, for it brings us the grace to live more intensely in the company of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Preparation for Christmas

Advent is the season of preparing for Christ's Coming, but what do we mean by Christ's Coming? We mean, first of all, His Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Bethlehem. If we do not prepare well for the annual commemoration of our Lord's Birth, then surely, we will not understand the meaning of our Christmas celebration. No matter how many times, over a lifetime, we prepare for the celebration of Christmas, it always seems new to us. The mystery of the Birth of God the Son in our human flesh can never be fully comprehended by us. We never cease to wonder at the great mystery of God's love for us.

Preparation for Christ's Coming in the Church

We also mean Christ's Coming to us in the Church or, better, His dwelling with us always in the Church. The Advent Season reminds us of the many ways, most of all, the Holy Eucharist, in which Christ, Who first came into the world at Bethlehem, now remains with us in the Church, until He returns in glory on the Last Day.

Through our observance of Advent, we overcome the tendency to reduce the life of Christ within us to an idea or sentiment, and we come face-to-face with the truth that, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we are alive in the same Christ Who was born at Bethlehem and Who died for us on Calvary.

Preparation for Christ's Coming on the Last Day

Lastly, the Coming of Christ, for which we prepare during Advent, is His Final Coming at the end of time. Christ, born at Bethlehem and alive for us in the Church, will bring to fullness His saving work, when He returns in glory to restore us and our world to God the Father. As Advent brings us more fully into the company of Christ, it also strengthens us for the pilgrimage of this life, which will reach its fullness, on the Last Day, when we, body and soul, will be with the Lord in the Heavenly Kingdom.

Preparing by Growing in Knowledge

How do we prepare for the Coming of Christ? Fundamental to our preparation is a deeper knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation through studying the Word of God, above all, the Gospels, and the teaching of the Word of God in the Church, above all, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

I recommend that your Advent observance include a daily reading from the *Gospel according to Luke* and the study of nos. 456 to 478 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Preparing by Growing in Prayer

Hand in hand with the growing knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation is the experience of the mystery in prayer and through participation in the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. I recommend receiving the forgiveness of your sins in the Sacrament of Penance, both at the beginning of Advent and again as Christmas draws near.

Frequent participation in Mass during the week, daily, if possible, is also an excellent means of observing Advent. The experience of our Lord's dwelling with us in the Holy Eucharist is profoundly deepened through visits to the Blessed Sacrament and adoration before the exposed Blessed Sacrament. We are blessed with so many chapels of Eucharistic Adoration in the Archdiocese. If you do not already have a regular hour of adoration each week, why not make Advent the time to begin spending a weekly hour with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? Why read the *Gospel according to Luke* and study the mystery of the Incarnation, as it is presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, during your Eucharistic adoration?

Advent is also an excellent time to renew devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, "formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary" (*Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*) and "pierced by our sins and for our salvation" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 478). If you have not enthroned the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in your home, why not request the booklet for the Enthronement from the Office of Sacred Worship?

The Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary is an excellent Advent prayer, helping us to meditate on the richness of the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. Especially, when the inviolable of human life is under such severe attack in our society, why not join in the Rosary Crusade for the Safeguarding of Embryonic Human Life. What better way to prepare for the Coming of Christ Who gave His life to save all men, without boundary or exception!

Lastly, deepening our knowledge of Christ's Coming and our experience of His Coming, we are led to witness to Christ's dwelling with us and to draw others to Christ. In our totally secularized society, the need of the new evangelization – the living of our Catholic faith with new enthusiasm and new energy – is more urgent than ever. May the Advent Season also be the time for us all to give Christ to others through the outpouring of pure and selfless love, in our homes, and through the educational, charitable and missionary works of the Church.

How did the Celebration of Advent come about?

The liturgical season of Advent marks the time of spiritual preparation by the faithful before Christmas. Advent begins on the Sunday closest to the Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle (Nov. 30). It spans four Sundays and four weeks of preparation, although the last week of Advent is usually truncated because of when Christmas falls.

The celebration of Advent has evolved in the spiritual life of the Church. The historical origins of Advent are hard to determine with great precision. In its earliest form, beginning in France, Advent was a period of preparation for the Feast of the Epiphany, a day when converts were baptized; so the Advent preparation was very similar to Lent with an emphasis on prayer and fasting which lasted three weeks and later was expanded to 40 days. In 380, the local Council of Saragossa, Spain, established a three-week fast before Epiphany. Inspired by the Lenten regulations, the local Council of Macon, France, in 581 designated that from Nov. 11 (the Feast of St. Martin of Tours) until Christmas fasting would be required on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Eventually, similar practices spread to England. In Rome, the Advent preparation did not appear until the sixth century, and was viewed as a preparation for Christmas with less of a penitential bent.

The Church gradually more formalized the celebration of Advent. The *Gelasian Sacramentary*, traditionally attributed to Pope St. Gelasius I (d. 496), was the first to provide Advent liturgies for five Sundays. Later, Pope St. Gregory I (d. 604) enhanced these liturgies composing prayers, antiphons, readings, and responses. Pope St. Gregory VII (d. 1095) later reduced the number of Sundays in Advent to four. Finally, about the ninth century, the Church designated the first Sunday of Advent as the beginning of the Church year.

Despite the “sketchy” history behind Advent, the importance of this season remains to focus on the coming of our Lord. (Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning “coming.”) The *Catechism* stresses the two-fold meaning of this “coming”: “When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for His second coming” (No. 524).

Therefore, on one hand, the faithful reflect back and are encouraged to celebrate the anniversary of the Lord’s first coming into this world. We ponder again the great mystery of the incarnation when our Lord humbled Himself, taking on our humanity, and entered our time and space to free us from sin. On the other hand, we recall in the *Creed* that our Lord will come again to judge the living and the dead and that we must be ready to meet Him.

A good, pious way to help us in our Advent preparation has been the use of the Advent wreath. (Interestingly, the use of the Advent wreath was borrowed from the German Lutherans in the early 1500s.) The wreath is a circle, which has no beginning or end: So we call to mind how our lives, here and now, participate in the eternity of God’s plan of salvation and how we hope to share eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. The wreath is made of fresh plant material, because Christ came to give us new life through His passion, death, and resurrection. Three candles are purple, symbolizing penance, preparation, and sacrifice; the pink candle symbolizes the same but highlights the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, when we rejoice because our preparation is now half-way finished.

The light represents Christ, who entered this world to scatter the darkness of evil and show us the way of righteousness. The progression of lighting candles shows our increasing readiness to meet our Lord. Each family

ought to have an Advent wreath, light it at dinner time, and say the special prayers. This tradition will help each family keep its focus on the true meaning of Christmas. In all, during Advent we strive to fulfill the opening prayer for the Mass of the First Sunday of Advent: "Father in Heaven, ... increase our longing for Christ our Savior and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of His coming may find us rejoicing in His presence and welcoming the light of His truth."

Advent: A Time to Address the Blessed Virgin Mary



Let us pray to Mary and this will help us live fully these joyful days as we look forward to Christmas. Let us say to Mary:

God the Father looked on you and loved you more any other creature. You are his favorite daughter.

God the Son looked forward to the day he would become man, become one of us, by taking our nature from you as his mother.

God the Holy Spirit had preserved you from Original Sin and gave you that fullness of grace right from the first moment of your existence.

As a child you were already full of grace, a delight to your parents and to God! You grew quickly in wisdom and in virtue.

Even as a teenager you were already a mature woman, virtuous in every way, with an intimate relationship with God

It was then that God sent his Archangel Gabriel to inform you of what he wanted of you: to be the mother of his Son, to bear him in your womb, to bring him into the world and to care for him as a mother cares for her infant child.

God looked upon you and saw that you were all fair, beautiful in body and soul. He knew that he could count on you, that you would be faithful to every grace he would give you.

You never disappointed God. You were always ready to offer a YES to God's inspirations.

In this way, you kept growing in grace and in love, day by day, moment by moment.

With great joy and gratitude, you brought Jesus Christ our Savior into the world. It was in Bethlehem, in a stable, on a winter's night. Christ came as the Light of the World, our Redeemer and Lord.

St. Joseph was there with you and he too, with a joyful heart, took the Child Jesus in his arms and whispered to him his love and devotion. It was a glorious moment... and we are all preparing ourselves to commemorate that moment, to relive it at Christmas.

As a young mother you dedicated yourself to the care of your Son. Nothing distracted you. You were ever attentive to the needs of the Child Jesus. You cared for him; you spent yourself for him... Jesus: the object of all your efforts.

And this was not just for one day... it was your way of life: all for Jesus, all for the Love of the Lord. Mary, I want to learn from you. Teach me to say YES to whatever God asks of me. Help me to see how my day -with my tasks, my family, my parents and my siblings, my home, my school and my teachers, my friends- is the place where God wants me to be. Here I can find God; here I can show my love for God, here I can serve Jesus.

Mary, as your life progressed you came to know Jesus ever better. You learned from him because you kept your eyes fixed on him. You came to know his sufferings and you shared in them because you were one with him. You offered your Son to his Father, there on Calvary, when he offered himself for our salvation. You also experienced the joy of his Resurrection and in time, you helped the Apostles to be strong in their faith and in their commitment to Jesus. Mary, help me to be faithful in all things.



The Catholic History of Christmas

Christmas is for joy, for giving and sharing, for laughter, for coming together with family and friends, for tinsel and brightly decorated packages... But mostly, Christmas is for love. It was this love for which Jesus came to this world and sacrificed his life.

Though the celebration of Christmas originated by Roman Catholics, who commemorate December 25th as the day of birth of Christ Child, it has gradually come to be celebrated by non-Catholics as well.

As far as the United States goes, the celebration of Christmas is of comparatively recent origin. Much of the world was already well into Christmas celebrations by the time the United States began to wake up. In the first half of the 19th century the Sunday

Schools in America held Christmas celebrations. And the celebration of Christmas in America owes its origin to these schools. Alabama was the first state to grant legal recognition to Christmas in 1836. The District of Columbia did it in 1870. By 1893 all the states and territories had made similar acknowledgements.

So be it the United States or in other parts of the world, Christmas is celebrated as the commemoration of the birth of the Messiah — the holiest event ever to take place anywhere on Earth, and an entirely worthy occasion to celebrate.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed,

who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in that region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ***And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:4-19).

Immediately after the fall of our first parents, God, in His infinite mercy, promised a redeemer, who would reconcile mankind with Him. Man would be saved from sin and the eternal punishment, which accompanies it. He would also gain the opportunity to merit eternal life with God in heaven. God choose not to fulfill this promise for thousands of years. Perhaps He waited so long in order that all mankind might be more aware of their misery and might more ardently desire the coming of the Redeemer. Those years passed slowly. They were dreary and dismal, and even dreadful because of the great Deluge, which swept away vast numbers of the human race, and again, by reason of the reign of fire which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and instantly burned all the inhabitants. During those years, many prayers were offered up for the coming of the Messiah.

The ancient patriarchs and prophets prayed that the heavens would open and let down the King of Justice. In the words of Isaiah, they prayed: "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up" (Is. 45:8).

But at length the time had come, the seventy weeks of years foretold by the Prophet Daniel (Dan. 9:24) has elapsed, the royal scepter had passed away from the House of Judah and "tidings of great joy were brought to all the people,"

The True Meaning of Christmas

Each year we are faced with the obstacle of a secular society, which tries to lure us away from the true meaning of Christmas.

We must never forget that we are celebrating the Incarnation. Jesus, the God-man, entered history to make atonement for our sin of rebellion against His Father and to lead us to salvation. Jesus came upon the stage of the world over 2,000 years ago, poor, helpless, and even homeless. Shepherds were told of His coming. In the spirit of giving they brought their own gifts of milk and bread and wool, and, most precious of all, their love. Wise men crossed continents carrying gorgeous gifts. They, too, wanted to give things to the baby Jesus. Of all their gifts the most pleasing to the Child was their love.

Ever since there has echoed in the heart of humanity the Christmas cry: "Give it to the baby Jesus." Yes, give everything to the baby Jesus. Every gift at this season of giving can be given to the Christ Child, if it is given in the spirit of Christ, for the sake of Christ, and the sake of Christ's own, the poor, the neglected, the weak, the weary.

Every act of kindness, every "Merry Christmas," every song, every celebration, every tiny and tremendous task of preparation, every note of your Christmas carols, every ornament hung on the

tree, every strand of straw in your crib, every good work, every gift given, can be, must be, given to him. Give it; give it all, to the Christ Child.

Giving is the spirit of Christmas. Every gift must be one of love, or it has lost all its meaning. And that love should be centered in the little Child who brought true love to the world.

We must give sorrow for sin; we must give promise of improvement; we must give, above all, a home in our hearts. We must give these things to the Christ Child today. Our hearts are what He wants. We must give them to Him. Our love is what He wants.

We must give it to Him today. Christ became a helpless little one in order that we might feel the heartthrobs that the human spirit holds out to a helpless child. He came to us in so vulnerable a fashion in order that we might come to love Him with the tenderness usually reserved for an infant. In that sweet sense may your Christmas be joyous.

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The Christmas card was introduced in England in 1844.

Christmas Day Homily

Father Vincent Gilmore O. Praem.

All the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah 52: 7-10.

God has spoken to us through the Son.

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 1: 1-18.



In 1914 on Christmas Eve, during the first months of World War I, the British and German troops faced each other in Belgium. Waterlogged and muddy trenches with barbed wire separated the two armies. There was constant firing of machine guns and pounding of artillery.

To make it feel more like Christmas both governments sent gift boxes for each soldier. The Germans received small Christmas trees with candles attached. Christmas Eve 1914, a cold dark night, the Germans set up the Christmas trees with lit candles above the trenches, then they began to sing Christmas carols. After a few Christmas trees were shot at the British became more curious and moved forward to watch and listen. After a while the British began to sing the familiar Christmas tunes. By Christmas morning there developed a no man's land between the trenches, soldiers were sharing rations, gifts, chocolate, cigarettes, and singing; soon they were even playing soccer.

But the high command on both sides felt they could not let this continue. The War must go on. Under threat of court martial the troops on both sides were ordered to separate and restart hostilities.

Reluctantly they drifted apart. A British soldier wrote in his journal, "We parted with much handshaking and good will." A German soldier said, "Today we have peace. Tomorrow you fight for your country; I fight for mine. Good luck." By New Year's Day the shooting had restarted. Millions would die before the war's end in 1918.

What happened on that battlefield in 1914 is exactly why Jesus came to this world and comes to each person. In the midst of war, chaos, and insanity, Jesus brought a moment of peace and true brotherhood. Like in the story

the Christmas peace and goodwill were short lived and gave way to what seems more normal; fighting, disorder, and brother against brother.

Jesus has the power to break through the insanity of this world and the insanity of our lives and bring the true peace and unity we desire and indeed were made for. The tragedy of this world is that sin and darkness has held this world hostage for so long that sin and darkness seem to be the normal state of affairs, and most people don't fight it, or want to change it.

Jesus had to come as a human being to show us another way. We don't have to be held hostage by sin. We don't have to be held hostage by disordered passions, desire, addictions, attachment and disunity. We don't have to be condemned by or defined by our sins, failure, weaknesses, and live in a state of guilt. What seems normal is not. Sin is not normal. Sin is a distortion of good. Sin with all its manifestations and consequences only leads to more chaos and ultimately unhappiness. The "good news" of Jesus, and this day is that Jesus gave us a way out, a formula for peace and happiness.

Unfortunately, Jesus' formula for peace and happiness has never enjoyed universal acceptance and so the fighting, frustration, and loneliness goes on. Until Jesus is accepted as the formula and standard the fighting will go on. Among most Christians the message and power of Jesus stays about as long as the Christmas decorations.

In order for Christ to have the desired and lasting effect, for his promises of joy and peace to work, Jesus must have a permanent place in our lives. He cannot be like a sweater put on and taken off.

If this baby we celebrate today is to have any effect in our world and lives he must have center stage. If he is restricted to a back room or a corner the desired effect will not take place, the peace and joy we all desire will be short lived and spotty at best. The baby we celebrate today promises everlasting peace and joy. A peace and joy we all desire of the variety all the money in the world can't buy. However, the promises come with a condition- follow my ways, keep my commandments, make me the center and then you will enjoy a peace and happiness, a peace and happiness the world cannot give. And so, the challenge of Christmas is to get this Christ child's influence to last the year round, not just a few days, not just on the surface, but to have him penetrate deeply and give him a permanent place in our life. He can't be with all the other stuff in our life that gets forgotten, neglected, and thrown out; no, this child wants to be, needs to be in the passenger seat at all times, seeing everything and having input on everything. It's a bad sign when he gets neglected to the back seat or gets thrown out of the car all together.

There is so much grace available today, on this Christmas Day. There is so much healing grace and power to restore and convert. This child comes bearing gifts, and he is willing and ready to give them to anyone who is ready to receive him.

We are happy today that God has sent a savior to save us from the sin, sadness, hatred, loneliness, and death that grips the world.

However, our joy and happiness is not full because this child needs more place and space in order to transform our lives into something better and more beautiful~ a life full of light, joy, and grace. We cannot change the world; we can change our lives.

This is the good news and joy of this day and the baby who lies in the manger. He is ready and waiting to penetrate and change our lives, not just for a day or a season, but for a lifetime. No, he is ready and waiting to change our lives for eternity.

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December 8, 2018 - Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

In the Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December, 1854, Pius IX pronounced and defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary "in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the

merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin."

Mary's Immaculate Conception Announced in Book of Genesis

"In the Advent season, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception prepares us in a special way for the coming of Jesus Christ". The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, on December 8, 1994, and spoke of the mystery of Mary's conception in salvation history. Here is a partial translation of his homily, which was given in Italian. The Pauline explanation of the biblical expression "grace" is indispensable if we are to understand in a correct and satisfactory way the words addressed to the Virgin of Nazareth at the Annunciation:

"Hail, full of grace!" (Lk 1:28). This "*fullness of grace*" points to the *Immaculate Conception*, a mystery which the Church professes and lives today in particular. "*To be holy and without blemish before him*" (Eph 1:4).

The Book of Genesis, especially in the first chapters, relates that God created man "immaculate". In God's sight *he lived all the simplicity of his human nature*; Adam and Eve related to one another in total, mutual trust and, although they were naked, felt no shame (cf. Gen 2:25). However, the "first sin" penetrated this "original innocence" of man created by God; and, as today's liturgy dramatically describes in the first reading, *it totally changed man's relationship with God, having an unfortunate effect on the relationship between man and woman*.

The Book of Genesis first shows *God seeking man*. "*Where are you?*" (cf. Gen 3:9), he asked him. And man replied: "I heard you in the garden, but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself" (Gen 3:10). The divine Interlocutor knew that this fear was far more deeply rooted. Man felt the need to hide from God, because *he had followed a call other than the Lord's*. Picking the forbidden fruit, our ancestors succumbed to the temptation of becoming *like gods*, capable of knowing good and evil (cf. Gen 3:5), capable, that is, of *autonomously deciding on what is good and what is evil, according to their own criteria*. Thus, sin appeared at the very moment when man, yielding to the evil spirit's persuasion, believed that he himself could be like God. Yes, he believed that his task was to become *a god in opposition to the one God*. The "non serviam" became, at the human level, the reflection of the "non serviam" which was first spoken by the spirit of evil.

Here we are as it were touching the root of the mystery. The mystery of today's solemnity, *the Immaculate Conception*, means that Mary, from the very first moment of her conception, was *preserved from the inheritance of original sin*. She was free from it because she had always been destined to be the Mother of Christ the Redeemer.

We hear *the first announcement* of this mystery in the Book of Genesis. Turning to the serpent, which symbolizes the spirit of evil, God said: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel" (Gen 3:15). These words are known as the *Protoevangelium*. They are the first announcement of the Good News about the salvation that Christ was to bring "in the fullness of time". It will be fulfilled through the work of the "offspring", that is, the son of the woman, who, to defeat the spirit of evil, will give himself up to death on a cross. This truth belongs completely to the New Testament, to the Gospel, but in the words recorded by the Book of Genesis, it has already, in a certain way, been foretold. This is why we speak of the *Protoevangelium*.

The first announcement reflects God's eternal plan to which the Letter to the Ephesians refers. Sin, present from the beginning, does not in fact alter the plan of God who "chose us before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him". Therefore, from the beginning *grace appears more powerful than sin*.

In a particular way, grace has shown itself to be more powerful than sin in her, eternally predestined to be the Mother of the world's Redeemer. The Angel Gabriel makes this choice known and greets her as "full of grace". He thus lets it be known that in her grace and holiness, deriving from her outstanding election, preceded the moment of conception. All men are redeemed after being contaminated by sin, at least by original sin. Christ redeemed the one chosen to be his Mother and preserved her from original sin. Thus, Mary came into the world immaculate and at no time in her earthly existence did sin stain her soul. This is why she is all holy: holy in a far more sublime way than the other saints, who also owe their holiness to the work of Redemption. And since Mary

is holy in this way, she was able to conceive the Son of God through the action of the Holy Spirit, as we read in the Gospel: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35).

"Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), Mary replied, and thus revealed how the Holy Spirit acts in her. There is no trace in her of the original "non serviam". The original temptation to become "a god in opposition to God" is totally alien to her. Precisely for this reason she could become the Mother of the Son of God and, becoming such, she can help all men to be adopted sons and daughters through Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:5).

Will Christmas be Outlawed in America Again?

The Puritans, including the group of them who came from England to our Plymouth shores, known as Pilgrims, banned Christmas. This was due to their intense hostility towards the "Romish Church," and the Church of England, charged with following "popish" practices.

Christmas was banned in England for eleven years by Act of Parliament (1659), during the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan party. In New England, Christmas was banned for twenty-two years by the Great and General Court of Massachusetts (the legislature).

Pilgrim Children were not allowed to have a Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, or a vacation from school on Christmas day. Adults were not allowed to feast, to dance, or to refrain from work on the 25th day of December. Such actions were punishable by fine or imprisonment. The Pilgrims boasted that they worked on Christmas.

Samuel Sewall, famous for the diary he kept, noted in his chronicle, covering the years 1623-1729, many of the hostile acts against the observance of Christmas. He recorded with satisfaction the number of stores open on Christmas days and the carts coming to town. "Some," he says, "somehow, observe the day, but are vexed, I believe, that the body of the people profane it; and blessed be God!"

Cotton Mather and other leaders of the Pilgrims pronounced as "blasphemy" the keeping of "Holy Days." They resented the forms of English celebrations, which, no doubt, fell at times to the level of boisterous revelry that were a discredit to religion. They wanted no "wanton Bacchanalian Christmases," spent "dicing, carding, masking (taking part in a masquerade), mumming (superstitious ceremonies), consumed in computations (drinking, carousing), in interludes, in excess of wine, in mad mirth." If they stopped there, the sympathies of most Christians would be on their side. But these dour immigrants to New England, who were known by their gait, dark clothing, lank hair, and sour demeanor, did not want any merry-making at Christmas whatsoever, for they hated all things Catholic, as the Devil hates holy water. Because of their Puritanical hatred of Christmas, Thanksgiving was made a prominent holiday. All the usual foods associated with Christmas in "Merri England" were rejected in favor of the indigenous turkey, Indian pudding, and pumpkin pie. Christmas carols were tabooed. In England the anti-Catholic feeling against the "popish" practice of celebrating Christmas culminated in the Roundhead (Puritan) Parliament (1643) abolishing saints' days, Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide. They even went so far as to destroy Holly and Mistletoe plants associated with Christmas, claiming that such plants were of the Evil One.

The enemies of the greatest Christian feast of the year attacked these and many more innocent joys, merely because they were of Catholic origin. Cromwell and his Puritans in England and on this side of the Atlantic are no more. On the other hand, the Church and the holy feast of Christmas continues to flourish in certain circles and do honor to the Babe of Bethlehem on December 25 of each year.

While Christmas is no longer banned in America or England, it is under serious attack, not only by modern paganistic and commercializing practices, but by the Anti-Christian left doing everything they can to remove all semblance of Christmas from our society.

Christmas is under attack because it is associated with Christianity--the very spiritual heritage upon which this nation was founded. The end game is to separate America from America's Christian heritage and history. No court has ever ruled that the Constitution requires government officials to censor Christmas carols, eliminate all

references to Christmas, or silence those who celebrate Christ's birth." Christmas is about Christ, despite what any Grinch might say.

A Christmas Poem

T'was the night before Christmas,
he lived all alone,
in a one-bedroom house made of
plaster and stone.

I had come down the chimney
with presents to give,
and to see just who
in this home did live.

I looked all about,
a strange sight I did see,
no tinsel, no presents,
not even a tree.
No stocking by mantle,
just boots filled with sand,
on the wall hung pictures
of far distant lands.

With medals and badges,
awards of all kinds,
a sober thought
came through my mind.

For this house was different,
it was dark and dreary,
I found the home of a soldier,
once I could see clearly.

The soldier lay sleeping,
silent, alone,
curled up on the floor
in this one-bedroom home.

The face was so gentle,
the room in such disorder,
not how I pictured
a United States soldier.

Was this the hero
of whom I'd just read?
curled up on a poncho,

the floor for a bed?

I realized the families
that I saw this night,
owed their lives to these soldiers
who were willing to fight.

Soon round the world,
the children would play,
and grownups would celebrate
a bright Christmas day.

They all enjoyed freedom
each month of the year,
because of the soldiers,
like the one lying here.

I couldn't help wonder
how many lay alone,
on a cold Christmas eve
in a land far from home.

The very thought
brought a tear to my eye,
I dropped to my knees
and started to cry.

The soldier awakened
and I heard a rough voice,
"Santa don't cry,
this life is my choice;

I fight for freedom,
I don't ask for more,
my life is my god,
my country, my corps."

The soldier rolled over
and drifted to sleep,
I couldn't control it,
I continued to weep.

I kept watch for hours,

so silent and still
and we both shivered
from the cold night's chill.

I didn't want to leave
on that cold, dark, night,
this guardian of honor
so willing to fight.

Then the soldier rolled over,

with a voice soft and pure,
whispered, "Carry on Santa,
it's Christmas day, all is secure."

One look at my watch,
and I knew he was right.
"Merry Christmas my friend,
and to all a good night."

This poem was written by a marine. The following is his request. I think it is reasonable....

Please, would you do me the kind favor of sending this to as many people as you can? Christmas will be coming soon, and some credit is due to our U.S. service men and women for our being able to celebrate these festivities. let's try in this small way to pay a tiny bit of what we owe. Make people stop and think of our heroes, living and dead, who sacrificed themselves for us. please, do your small part to plant this small seed.

May God bless you and have a great holiday season!!

St Stephen - Great Moments in Catholic History

St. Stephen's Day, or the Feast of St. Stephen is celebrated on 26 December in the Western Church and 27 December in the Eastern Church.

The first martyr in the history of the Catholic Church was a man named Stephen. Like many other Jews Stephen was a convert to the Catholic Church. He later became a deacon.

The Apostles, who were bishops, and the Priests, who assisted the Bishops, preached the truths of Our Lord and administered His sacraments. From the very beginning, however, the Catholic Church collected money and goods and distributed them to the poor. To do this was the duty of the first deacons.

We read about St. Stephen in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

While taking care of the needs of the poor, St. Stephen was also a great preacher. He told the people about Our Lord, about His Resurrection and about the Church Which Our Lord founded.

"And Stephen, full of grace and fortitude, did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8).

Certain Jews hated St. Stephen. He was arrested and brought before the Jewish Council. Standing before the High Priest, Stephen spoke about the wonderful favors, which God had always bestowed upon the Jewish people. He also reproved them for persecuting Our Lord Jesus Christ, just as their ancestors had persecuted the prophets.

His enemies were cut to the heart by his speech. They rushed upon him, dragged him outside the city and stoned him. Thus, it was that St. Stephen became the first martyr. The word "martyr" means witness. It is used to describe those who have suffered death because they believed in the Faith.

As a deacon St. Stephen was devoted to charity. He was charitable to the end. The last words of St. Stephen were a prayer that God would forgive those who killed him.

"And falling on his knees, he cried with a loud voice, saying: Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:59).

St. Stephen was the first among millions of Catholics who have died for the Faith or our Lord.

We must always live for Our Lord. We must also be ready, if necessary, to die for him.

—*Great Moments in Catholic History*, by Rev. Edward Curran. Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1938, p. 9.
