



HOLY FAMILY IN EGYPT, NICOLAUS POUSSIN (1655-1657)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2015

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH Say yes to the unknown

It is good and right to hold Jesus' family in the highest esteem. But in reality we have very few details about their daily lives. When we search scripture for clues we learn that Joseph and Mary each said *yes* to the unknown as they accepted the responsibility of parenthood. In truth, that is the situation encountered by every parent. We embrace the gift of life and do our best to parent and bring our children closer to God. But it is not a clear science. It is indeed entering the unknown with a sacrificial *yes* that allows every parent to share in the creative work of God. On this third day of Christmas, give the gift of gratitude to a parent you know.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28 or Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 or Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:41-52 (17).* "Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you."

MONDAY, DECEMBER 28

FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS Let them be heard

"Children should be seen and not heard." Aristophanes voiced this maxim in 423 B.C. By the 15th century, a clergyman's sermon amended it to "A *maiden* should be seen but not heard," and four centuries later Thackeray agreed that "little girls" are properly silent. B.W. Bellamy's 1915 *Table Rules for Little Folks* restores the original idea that children are best seen and silent. However you say it, this idea leaves the most vulnerable members of society open to bullying, violence, and abuse. On this fourth day of Christmas, give the gift of your attention to children.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 1:5-2:2; Matthew 2:13-18 (698).* "A voice was heard in Ramah . . . Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled."

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29

FEAST OF THOMAS BECKET, BISHOP, MARTYR Speak truth to power

In 1162, King Henry II of England appointed his good friend Thomas Becket as archbishop of Canterbury, which was the most powerful church position in the country. The king was hoping Becket would be his political puppet, but Becket realized his duty and out of principle refused to yield control of the church in England to the throne, and because of his stance he was martyred. When you're given responsibilities, remember that you're responsible to the people you serve, not the ones who got you there.



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

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TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:3-11; Luke 2:22-35 (202).* "... whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him."

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 30

SIXTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD In praise of praise

Criticism is easy to dispense. We can always find the dust on the relative's bookshelves, the imperfection in the child's homework, the moral fault in our neighbor. But how often do we offer praise where praise is due? The epistle writers of the New Testament take equal time to strengthen and encourage the community with words of affirmation and to steer it with corrections. On this sixth day of Christmas, give the gift of encouragement to someone who hasn't heard it lately.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:12-17; Luke 2:36-40 (203).* "I am writing to you, young men, because you have conquered the Evil One."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31

SEVENTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD Sharing the light of faith

How do we talk about our faith to others? Some may cringe: "Heavens, what a question!" Proselytizing is a game we'd prefer to leave to religious hustlers, and rightly so. But the witness of our faith is something to share generously, starting with our families and friends. If you had a plate of amazing cookies, wouldn't you eagerly bring them out to pass around? How much more the Good News of God's love and forgiveness? On this seventh day of Christmas, give the gift of a favorite Bible verse to someone you love.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:18-21; John 1:1-18 (204).* "He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him."

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 2016

OCTAVE DAY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD; SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD Celebrate all that is new

The feast of Mary as Mother of God occurs this year at the start of the new calendar year. Both are times of new beginnings. We celebrate Mary, who through her "yes" has borne Emmanuel, "God with us," marking a new moment in history. We also celebrate the New Year, with many of us resolving to make some kind of change for the better. How might Mary inspire you to newness this year? How might you inspire others? On this eighth day of Christmas, give the gift of gratitude for Mary's example of openness to God's calling.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21 (18).* "And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart."

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2

FEAST OF BASIL THE GREAT AND GREGORY NAZIANZUS, BISHOPS, DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH Holiness can be a family affair

Several giants of the Early Church, including today's saints Basil and Gregory Nazianzus, were inspired by Basil's older sister Macrina (whose brothers also included two other saints, Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste). Macrina deeply influenced her family with her asceticism. With the help of her younger brother, Peter, Macrina turned the family estate into a monastery and convent, providing a peaceful shelter for study and meditation. What inspiration can you draw from family members as you resolve to deepen your commitment to Christ in this new year dedicated to mercy?

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:22-28; John 1:19-28 (205).* "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"