

**SUNDAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS**  
**HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH**  
**FEAST**

CYCLES 1 and 2

**First Reading.** *Ep. 5: 21 – 6: 4*

*The Christian life in the family.*

**A reading from the Letter to the Ephesians of St. Paul, apostle.**

[Eph 5:21] Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

[Eph 5:22] Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

[Eph 5:23] For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

[Eph 5:24] As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

[Eph 5:25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

[Eph 5:26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

[Eph 5:27] that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

[Eph 5:28] Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

[Eph 5:29] For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,

[Eph 5:30] because we are members of his body.

[Eph 5:31] "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

[Eph 5:32] This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church;

[Eph 5:33] however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

CHAPT

[Eph 6:1] Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

[Eph 6:2] "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise),

[Eph 6:3] "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth."

[Eph 6:4] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Ep. 6: 1 – 2; Lk. 2: 51*

**R:** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, \* honour your father and your mother because this is just.

**V:** Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, and was subjected to them.

**R.** Honour your father and your mother because this is just.

**Second Reading.** *Disc. Of Nazareth 5: 1 – 64*

*The example of Nazareth.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of Paul VI, pope.**

The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus – the school of the Gospel.

The first lesson we learn here is to look, to listen, to meditate and penetrate the meaning – at once so deep and so mysterious – of this very simple, very humble and very beautiful manifestation of the Son of God. Perhaps we learn, even imperceptibly, the lesson of imitation.

Here we learn the method that will permit us to understand who Christ is. Here above all is made clear the importance of taking into account the general picture of his life among us, with its varied background of place, of time, of customs, of language, of religious practises – in fact, everything Jesus made use of to reveal himself to the world. Here everything is eloquent, all has a meaning.

Here, in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ.

How gladly would I become a child again, and go to school once more in this humble and sublime school of Nazareth: close to Mary, I wish I

could make a fresh start at learning the true science of life and the higher wisdom of divine truths.

But I am only a passing pilgrim. I must renounce this desire to pursue in this home my still incomplete education in the understanding of the Gospel. I will not go on my way however without having gathered – hurriedly, it is true, and as if wanting to escape notice – some brief lessons from Nazareth.

First, then, a lesson of silence. May esteem for silence, that admirable, and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us, besieged as we are by so many uplifted voices, the general noise and uproar, in our seething and over-sensitised modern life.

May the silence of Nazareth teach us recollection, the disposition to listen to good inspirations and the teachings of true masters. May it teach us the need for and the value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of personal inner life, of the prayer that God alone sees in secret.

Next, there is a lesson in family life. May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character. Let us learn from Nazareth that the formation received at home is gentle and irreplaceable. Let us learn the prime importance of the role of the family in the social order.

Finally, there is a lesson of work. Nazareth, home of the ‘Carpenter’s Son’, in you I would choose to understand and proclaim the severe and redeeming law of human work; here I would restore the awareness of the nobility of work; and reaffirm that work cannot be an end in itself, but that its freedom and its excellence derive, over and above its economic worth, from the value of those for whose sake it is undertaken. And here at Nazareth, to conclude, I want to greet all the workers of the world, holding up to them their great pattern, their brother who is God. He is the prophet of all their just causes, Christ our Lord.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. 2 Cor. 13: 11; Ep. 5: 19; Col. 3: 23*

**R:** Be happy, search for that which is perfect, encourage one another to good, live in peace with one another, \* sing and give praise to God with all your hearts.

**V:** Whatever is your work, do it with a good spirit, for the Lord, and not for men.

**R:** Sing and give praise to God with all your hearts.

Or

**Second Reading.** *Hom. 2*

*The Baby Jesus, who is born for us today,  
is the true light, the true life, the true justice.*

**A reading from the “Homilies on the Song of Songs” of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.**

The baby Jesus, who today is born for us, grows in those who welcome him, in wisdom, age and grace, but in different measure: he is not identical in everyone, but adapts according to the willingness and capacity of each one, and in the measure in which he is welcomed; he shows himself a baby, adolescent, adult. He is like a cluster on the vine: it is not always seen to be the same but changes as seasons go on; it germinates, it blossoms, becomes fruit, matures, becomes wine.

The vineyard, in the fruit that is not yet mature and ready for wine, already contains the promise, but awaits the right season: it cannot be said nevertheless that the cluster is without attraction. Instead of enticing the taste, it entices the sense of smell; while awaiting the grape harvest, it comforts the heart with hope. The steady and sure faith of the grace hoped for, is already an enjoyment for he who waits with patience. Also the cluster of Cyprus: promises wine, even though not yet existing; with the flowers however (the flower is the hope) it gives the guarantee of a future grace. He who with his will adheres fully to the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night, grows like a flourishing tree irrigated by a spring of living water, and in its time produces fruit. Therefore the vineyard of the Bridegroom, whose roots sink into the fertile oasis of Engaddi, that is in the profound meditation irrigated and nourished by the Sacred Scripture, produces this verdant cluster in flower, that is the soul which has its eye fixed on the one who has planted and cultivated it. How beautiful is this culture, whose fruit reflects the beauty of the Bridegroom!

He in fact is the true light, the true life and true justice, as it is read in Wisdom and in other passages of Scripture. When a man with his deeds reaches the fullness of his being, he sees in the “cluster” of his soul the same Bridegroom, because he contemplates the light of truth in the

splendour and purity of his life. Therefore that fertile vineyard says: Mine is the cluster that flowers and germinates.

This is the cluster suspended to the wood whose blood becomes nourishment and salvation for those who drink it and who rejoice in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom alone be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

**Responsorial.** *Heb. 2: 16 – 17; Bar. 3: 38*

**R:** Christ does not take care of the angels, but he takes care of the descendants of Abraham. \* For this he had to make himself similar to the brothers in everything, in order to become merciful and to expiate the sins of the people.

**V:** Our God has appeared on the earth and has lived among men.

**R:** For this he had to make himself similar to the brothers in everything, in order to become merciful and to expiate the sins of the people.

YEAR A

**Gospel.** *Mt 2: 13 – 15, 19 – 23*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

[Mat 2:13] Now when the Magi had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

[Mat 2:14] And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt,

[Mat 2:15] and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

[Mat 2:16] Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.

[Mat 2:17] Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

[Mat 2:18] "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more."

[Mat 2:19] But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,

[Mat 2:20] "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."

[Mat 2:21] And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

[Mat 2:22] But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

[Mat 2:23] And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

### **Third Reading.**

*Mary and Joseph are besides the Baby Jesus.*

**A reading from the "Homilies" for the day of Christmas of St. John Chrysostom, bishop.**

Jesus enters into Egypt in order to make the lamentation of the ancient pain cease; and in the place of the plagues he brought joy, in the place of the darkness of death he dispensed the light of salvation.

The water of the river had been contaminated by the blood of the tender children. He, who would have made the waters red, entered into Egypt; he gave to the living waters the virtue of generating salvation and, with the power of the Holy Spirit, he eliminated every impurity and foulness. The Egyptians, saddened and taken up by fury, had refused to obey God. He entered therefore into Egypt and, flooding the souls, willing to welcome him, with the light of the knowledge of God, he gave to the water the power of fertilizing a harvest of martyrs more abundant than a harvest of grain.

What shall I say therefore? I see a carpenter and a manger, I see also a baby and cloths and swaddling clothes, a baby born of a virgin, lacking the most necessary things, everything in the grip of poverty, in the greatest misery. Have you ever seen riches in extreme poverty? In what way he, rich

as he was, has made himself poor for us? How is it that he did not find a bed, a couch, but was placed in a poor manger?

O immense richness hidden under the semblance of poverty? He lay in a manger and shook the whole world; he is wrapped in swaddling clothes and broke the chains of sin; he did not speak as yet and instructed the Magi moving them to conversion. What more can be said? Behold: the Baby is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lies in a manger; but besides him is Mary, who is both virgin and mother, besides him is also Joseph who is called father.

To him Mary was only engaged and the Holy Spirit had made her a mother; therefore Joseph, perplexed, did not know how to call the Baby. But while he was absorbed in these thoughts, the announcement was brought to him from heaven by the voice of an angel: “Do not fear, Joseph, because he who is generated in her comes from the Holy Spirit” (cfr. Mt. 1: 20). The Holy Spirit, in fact, had spread his shadow over the Virgin.

Why then is he born of a virgin who conserves her virginity? Exactly because one day the devil had seduced the virgin Eve, the angel Gabriel brings the good news to the Virgin Mary. But Eve, seduced, gave birth to a word that introduced death; Mary instead, welcoming the happy announcement, generated in the flesh the Word who recovers eternal life for us.

**Responsorial.** *Mt. 2: 13 – 15*

**R:** Get up, take with you the baby and his mother and flee to Egypt \* and remain there until I tell you.

**V:** So that what was said by the Lord through the prophet may be fulfilled: from Egypt I have called my son.

**R:** And remain there until I tell you.

**Gospel. *Lk. 2: 22 – 40***

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.**

[Luke 2:22] And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

[Luke 2:23] (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")

[Luke 2:24] and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

[Luke 2:25] Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

[Luke 2:26] And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

[Luke 2:27] And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law,

[Luke 2:28] he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

[Luke 2:29] "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;

[Luke 2:30] for mine eyes have seen thy salvation

[Luke 2:31] which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,

[Luke 2:32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

[Luke 2:33] And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him;

[Luke 2:34] and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against

[Luke 2:35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

[Luke 2:36] And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phan'u-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity,

[Luke 2:37] and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.



[Luke 2:38] And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

[Luke 2:39] And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.

[Luke 2:40] And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

**Third Reading. Hom. 12**

*Christ, having assumed the condition of a servant,  
was numbered among the slaves.*

**A reading from different “Homilies” of Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.**

We have already seen the Emmanuel lying as a baby in the manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes like every small human being, but celebrated as God by the choirs of angels. They will be the ones who announce his birth to the shepherds. God the Father, in fact, confers to the heavenly spirits the highest privilege of being the first to preach Christ. Today we have seen the author of the law, God subjecting himself to the Mosaic Law, as a subject of it like a man. For this Paul, full of wisdom says: “When we were children we were like slaves of the elements of the world. But when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son born of a woman, born under the law, in order to ransom those who were under the law” (Gal. 4: 3 – 5). Christ, therefore ransomed from the curse of the law those who were under the law, not those who were its guardians. How did he ransom them? Fulfilling it; in other words, demonstrating himself obedient and subjected in everything to God the Father for us, repairing the sin of the transgression of Adam. It is written in fact that “as through the disobedience of only one man all men have been constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of only one man, all men will be constituted just” (Rm. 5: 19).

With us he bowed his head under the law, and he did it in order to settle an account of justice.

It was necessary in fact that he fulfilled all justice. He had accepted the condition of a servant and had entered with his humanity in the number of subjects: he paid therefore like the others the drachma of the tribute and even double, even though, as the Son of God, he was by nature free and exempt from all tribute. Do not be scandalised when you see him observing the law and do not think that he, free, is obliged to observe it, but force yourself rather to penetrate the depths of the divine plan. Therefore the eighth day having arrived in which, according to the prescription of the law, it was customary to be circumcised, he was given the name, and precisely that of Jesus, which means “Salvation of the people”.

This in fact is what God the Father wants his Son, born of a woman according to the flesh, to be called. It is exactly then that the salvation of the people is realized. Contemporary he was circumcised and the name was imposed. Christ then became the light to illuminate the nations and the glory of Israel. And even if in Israel some did not believe in him and showed themselves obstinate and fools, a “remnant” above all was saved and glorified through Jesus Christ. The disciples of the Lord were the first fruits of him whose glory shines over all the earth. Christ is the glory of Israel because, according to the flesh, he was born of her, even if, as God, he was above all and is blessed for all ages.

With regard to this, that which the inspired evangelist teaches us is useful, narrating all that the Son, made flesh, suffered for us, not disdaining to assume our fragility, so that we could give glory to him as Redeemer, Lord, Saviour and God, because to Him and with Him, to God the Father and to the Holy Spirit is due the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

**Responsorial.** *Lk. 2: 30b – 33*

**R:** You prepared your salvation, O Lord, in front of all the peoples. \* Light to illuminate the nations and glory of your people Israel.

**V:** The father and mother of Jesus were surprised by the things that were being said about him.

**R:** Light to illuminate the nations and glory of your people Israel.

YEAR C

**Gospel.** *Lk. 2: 41 – 52*

### **A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.**

[Luke 2:41] Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover.

[Luke 2:42] And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom;

[Luke 2:43] and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it,

[Luke 2:44] but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances;

[Luke 2:45] and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him.

[Luke 2:46] After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions;

[Luke 2:47] and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

[Luke 2:48] And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."

[Luke 2:49] And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

[Luke 2:50] And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them.

[Luke 2:51] And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

[Luke 2:52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.

### **Third Reading. *Hom. 18: 2 – 5***

*In anguish we search for Jesus.*

### **A reading from the “Homily on Luke” of Origen, presbyter.**

At twelve years Jesus remains in Jerusalem without his parents realizing it. Anxiously they search for him and do not manage to find him.

They interrogate relations, friends and those whom they know, but he is not among them. His parents, therefore search for him; his father who had

looked after him and had accompanied him in Egypt. He, above all, does not let himself be found as soon as they start searching for him. They do find him among their relations and blood relations: my Jesus does not let himself be found in the midst of the confusion. Listen where, after having searched for him a lot, they manage to find him, so that you also, together with Mary and Joseph, can find him. And searching for him – he says – “they found him in the temple” (Lk. 2: 46). In no other place other than the temple. This is not enough, but “in the midst of the doctors while he listened to them and questioned them” (Lk. 2: 46). You also, therefore, search for Jesus in the temple, search for him in the Church, search for him among the masters who are in the Church and who do not go far away from it. And you will find him.

On the other hand, if someone says that he is a master and does not possess Jesus, he is a master only in name, and Jesus, Word and Wisdom of God, does not let himself be found in him. They find him while he sits in the midst of the doctors, and he not only sits, but also questions them and listens to them. Now also Jesus is here with us questioning us and listening to us. “And all those who heard him were full of amazement” (Lk. 2: 47). Why? Certainly not because of his questions, even if they were extraordinary, but by his answers. He questioned the doctors and, because they could not answer to some of his questions, he himself answered. But his answer is not in the ability of the discussion, but in the wisdom of the sacred Scriptures: you also, therefore, let yourself be instructed by the divine law. Moses spoke and God answered him face to face. His answers taught him those things that he did not know. Jesus interrogates and answers; and, as I have already said, if his questions are extraordinary, much more are his answers. Let us pray and search for him with torment and anguish, until we also can feel ourselves provoked by his questions, to which he himself then answers.

It is not written in vain: “Your father and I, in anguish were searching for you” (Lk. 2: 48). It is necessary that the one who searches for Jesus, does not search for him negligently, lightly, without commitment, as some do and are therefore unable to find him. We instead say: “In anguish we search for you!” and to our soul that searches for him with passion and commitment he will answer: “Do you not know that I have to occupy myself with the things of my Father?” (Lk. 2: 49)

Or

**Third Reading.** *Hom. 1: 19*

*Jesus grew in knowledge, age and grace.*

**A reading from the “Homilies” of St. Bede, the Venerable, presbyter.**

The page of the gospel that has just been read is clear, dearest brothers, and does not need any explanation. It describes to us the infancy and the childhood of our Redeemer, with which he deigns to share in our humanity; and it reminds us of the eternal divine majesty in which he remains and will always remain equal to the Father. And this because, recalling the humiliation to which he subjected himself by incarnating himself, let us try to cure the wounds of sin with the medicine of true humility. If he, from the heights of his majesty, did not disdain to humiliate himself for us up to the point of assuming the infirmity of our fragile flesh, how much more we, who are earth and ashes, must humiliate ourselves full of gratitude, for love of God and for our salvation.

When at twelve years he sits in the temple among the doctors, listening and questioning them, he gives us a proof of human humility and a splendid example to be imitated. When, seated in the temple, he then says: “I have to occupy myself with the things of my Father” (Lk. 2: 49), he affirms his power and his glory that is coeternal with that of the Father.

When he returns to Nazareth and remains subjected to his parents, he demonstrates that he is true man and he gives us again an example of humility. He was in fact subject to men in that nature in which he was inferior to the Father.

And “his mother conserved in her heart with great care all that she had heard said about the Lord and all that he himself said and did; and she entrusted everything to memory, so that, when the time came to preach or write about his incarnation, she would be able to say everything exactly as it had happened.

Let us imitate, my brothers, the holy Mother of the Lord, by jealously conserving in our hearts the words and the works of our Saviour: meditating on them day and night, let us repulse the annoying assaults of vain and perverse desires. If in fact we desire to dwell in the beatitudes of heaven, in the house of the Lord, and to praise him in eternity, it is extremely necessary that we show clearly in this life also that which we desire for the

future life: not only going to Church to sing the praises of the Lord, but also witnessing with words and works, in every place of his kingdom, all that gives glory and praise to our Creator.

After having said that “Jesus grew in wisdom, age and grace” justly he adds: “in front of God and men” (Lk. 2: 52) because, as he grew up he showed to men the gifts of wisdom and grace that were in him, thus he pushed them to always praise the Father, doing himself that which he commands us: “In this way your light will shine out in front of men, because seeing your good works they may give glory to your Father who is in heaven”. (Mt. 5: 16)

**Responsorial.** *Lk. 2: 47; Is. 45: 15*

**R:** All those who heard him were full of amazement because of his intelligence and his answers. \* On seeing him his parents were amazed.

**V:** Truly you are a mysterious God, God of Israel, and Saviour.

**R:** On seeing him his parents were amazed.

**26<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

## SAINT STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR

### FEAST

**First Reading.** *Act. 6: 8 – 7: 2a. 44 – 59*

*The martyrdom of Stephen.*

**A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.**

[Acts 6:8] And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

[Acts 6:9] Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyre'nians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cili'cia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen.

[Acts 6:10] But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.

[Acts 6:11] Then they secretly instigated men, who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

[Acts 6:12] And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council,

[Acts 6:13] and set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law;

[Acts 6:14] for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

[Acts 6:15] And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

CHAPT

ER 7

[Acts 7:1] And the high priest said, "Is this so?"

[Acts 7:2] And Stephen said: "Brethren and fathers, hear me.

[Acts 7:44] "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, even as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen.

[Acts 7:45] Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations which God thrust out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David,

[Acts 7:46] who found favor in the sight of God and asked leave to find a habitation for the God of Jacob.

[Acts 7:47] But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

[Acts 7:48] Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says,

[Acts 7:49] `Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?

[Acts 7:50] Did not my hand make all these things?'

[Acts 7:51] "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

[Acts 7:52] Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,

[Acts 7:53] you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

[Acts 7:54] Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him.

[Acts 7:55] But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;

[Acts 7:56] and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."

[Acts 7:57] But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him.

[Acts 7:58] Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

[Acts 7:59] And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

### **Responsorial.**

**R:** Stephen, servant of God, stoned by the Jews, saw the heavens opened, and he entered: \* blessed is the man for whom the heavens open themselves.

**V:** A tempest of stones overwhelmed him, but the glory of God shown for him from heaven.

**R:** Blessed is the man for whom the heavens open themselves.



**Second Reading.** *Disc. 3: 1 – 3, 5 – 6*

*The weapons of charity.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, bishop.**

Yesterday we celebrated the birth in time of our eternal king; today we celebrate the triumphant death of a soldier.

Yesterday our king put on the robe of flesh, and coming out of the court of the Virgin’s womb, deigned to visit the earth. Today a soldier leaves the earthly tabernacle of his body, and goes up in triumph to heaven.

Our king, though he is most high, came for our sake in great humility, but he could not come empty handed. He brought with him, as it were, a great bonus for his soldiers, which not only made them abundantly rich, but also gave them strength to fight and conquer. The gift he brought was love, which brings men into fellowship with the Godhead.

What he brought he gave away freely. But the wonder of it was this: while he made rich the poverty of his faithful followers he did not take away from his own greatness, but remained filled with never- failing treasures.

The love then that brought Christ down from heaven to earth, lifted Stephen from heaven to earth. The love that showed itself first in the king, shone forth next in the soldier. And Stephen, so as to deserve to win the crown – which is what his name means – had love as his weapon and by it was everywhere victorious, through love of God he did not yield to the raging of the Jews, and through love of his neighbour he prayed for those who were stoning him, through love he accused those who were in the wrong that they may be corrected. Through love he prayed for those stoning him to save them from punishment.

Trusting in the strength of love he overcame the cruel raging of Saul, and so won for himself as a companion in heaven, the man who had been his persecutor on earth. This holy and untiring love ardently desired to acquire as converts by his prayers those whom he had been unable to convert by argument.

And now Paul rejoices with Stephen, with Stephen he enjoys the brightness of Christ; he exults with Stephen, he reigns with Stephen.

What a really true life must there be now, brethren, where Paul is not put to confusion although he killed Stephen, but where instead, Stephen rejoices in the fellowship of Paul; for in both of them love itself rejoices. In

Stephen, love overcame the ferocity of the Jews, in Paul it covered a multitude of sins, and in both of them love deserved to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Love, therefore, is the origin and source of all good things; it is a most excellent defence, the road that leads to heaven. Whoever walks in love can neither stray nor be afraid. Love guides, love protects, love leads to the end.

Christ our Lord, brethren, set up for us this ladder of love, and by it every Christian can climb to heaven. You must, therefore, keep a firm hold on love, you must show it to one another, and by progress in it climb up to heaven.

### **Responsorial.**

**R:** Yesterday the Lord Jesus was born in this world, so that today Stephen could be born to the life of heaven; he has come on earth, \* so that Stephen could enter with him into glory.

**V:** Our King, vested with human flesh, has come out of the womb of the Virgin, and has come into the world.

**R:** so that Stephen could enter with him into glory.

Or.

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 23: 4*

*Stephen, full of faith and strength.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.**

Christ came for the salvation of the world, and immediately the fruits appeared in the Church. Christ the witness of the truth shone forth, and immediately the witnesses of the new economy of grace sparkled.

The disciples follow the master walking in his footsteps, bearers of Christ, behind Christ, illuminators of the earth behind the Sun of justice; and first of all flowers Stephen, the “crown” not woven with sterile thorns, but the first fruit offered to God from the fertility of the Church.

The workers of the evangelical truth offer to the Lord a first sign of total religious dedication, Stephen, the first fruits of their cultivation of the field of God, a holy man: they offer him as a crown woven of many and different virtues.

To this admirable man was entrusted first of all the care of the widows, because according to the judgement and choice that the Apostles made of him, and because of his spiritual wisdom, he was found to be a faithful man, full of the Holy Spirit. And truly he had given an example of such a living fervour and courage in defending and making known the gospel, that his preaching was accompanied by great miracles of the divine power.

“Stephen, full of grace and power, did great prodigies and miracles” (Act. 6: 8). He did not think that assisting the widows could be an impediment for him, but although accepting voluntarily this honour, he did not desist from the ministry of the word; and it was exactly this that aroused around him great admiration: to see the completely singular generosity of soul that moved him to assume so much hard work.

He looked after the widows and he gave all of himself to the conquest of souls; he nourished the first by procuring bread for them and instructed the second through his discourses; for the first he provided for the material table, to the second he gave spiritual nourishment.

He was an irreproachable man full of the Holy Spirit; with the kindness of the soul he fulfilled the task of nourishing the poor, and with the freedom of the word and the strength of the Holy Spirit he closed the mouths of the enemies of the truth.

**Responsorial.** *Act. 6: 9, 10, 12*

**R:** Some men of the synagogue arose to argue with Stephen, \* but they were unable to resist to the inspired wisdom with which he spoke.

**V:** And thus they stirred up the people, they captured him and dragged him in front of the Sanhedrin.

**R:** But they were unable to resist to the inspired wisdom with which he spoke.

**Gospel.** *Mt. 10: 17 – 22*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

[Mat 10:17] Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues,

[Mat 10:18] and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles.

[Mat 10:19] When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour;

[Mat 10:20] for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

[Mat 10:21] Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death;

[Mat 10:22] and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

**Third Reading.** *Disc. 27: 9*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of me.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.**

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5: 10). Behold the aim and the effect of the battle fought for God, of the dangers encountered out of love for him, the recompense of the toils, the prize of a lot of sweat: in this way the athletes of God obtain the kingdom of heaven.

But the Lord, who knows the human fragility, pre-announces to the weaker the final outcome of the difficult battle, so that the hope of the eternal kingdom will make their victory, over the fear of the adversity that they have to face in time, easier. For this the heroic Stephen delighted in the stones that rained on him from all directions; he welcomed them with desire, like a pleasant dew, the blows that arrived thickly like snow flakes, he answered the wicked murderers by blessing them and praying that they would not be charged with this crime. He had heard the divine promise and saw that his hope was in complete agreement with the apparition that he enjoyed.

He had heard that those persecuted for the faith would be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven, and while he suffered martyrdom he saw that which he hoped for. The object of his hope showed himself to him while through the profession of faith he was running to meet him; it is the heaven open, it is the divine glory from heaven who is the spectator of the struggle of his runner, it is Christ himself who assists the athlete in his trial. He, who presides over the agony, upright on his feet, is meant to signify symbolically

the help that he gives to the combatant, in order to teach us that it is he himself who is present in favour of his persecuted, against the persecutors. And therefore what can be of greater joy for the one who suffers persecution for the Lord, than to be able to have as a help in battle He Himself who presides over the battle? “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of me” (Mt. 5: 11). Our life needs to have a “Where” on which it can fix itself; if there is nothing that pushes us outside, beyond the earth, we always remain of the earth: if instead we let ourselves be attracted by the heaven, we will be transported up there. Do you see where the beatitudes lead that, through the apparently sad and painful events, it brings you to acquire such a great good? The Apostle too had noted: “Every correction, at the moment, does not seem to cause joy, but sadness; afterwards however it brings a fruit of peace and justice to those who through it have been taught” (Heb. 12: 11); therefore the affliction is the flower of the hoped for fruit. For love of the fruit let us gather the flower also! Let us move and run, but let us not run in vain: let our race be directed towards the prize of our heavenly vocation. Let us run in a way that we may obtain it!

Let us not afflict ourselves therefore when we are tortured and suffer persecution; rather let us rejoice, because when we are deprived of the things that are held in estimation on the earth, we are called to the goods of heaven, according to the word of He who has promised the beatitudes to all those who, for his cause will be afflicted and persecuted: to these is the kingdom of heaven, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and supreme power forever and ever. Amen.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Act. 7: 59, 60*

**R:** While they were stoning him, the blessed Stephen prayed and said:  
\*Lord Jesus receive my spirit.

**V:** He then knelt down and cried out in a loud voice: Lord do not impute this sin to them.

**R:** Lord Jesus receive my spirit.

**27<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

## SAINT JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST FEAST.

**First Reading.** *1 Jn. 1: 1 – 2: 3*

*The Word of life is the light of God.*

**A reading from the First Letter of St. John, apostle.**

[1 John 1:1] That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life --

[1 John 1:2] the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us --

[1 John 1:3] that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

[1 John 1:4] And we are writing this that our joy may be complete.

[1 John 1:5] This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

[1 John 1:6] If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth;

[1 John 1:7] but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

[1 John 1:8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

[1 John 1:9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[1 John 1:10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

CHAPT

ER 2

[1 John 2:1] My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

[1 John 2:2] and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

[1 John 2:3] And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. 1 Jn. 1: 2, 4; Jn. 20: 31*

**R:** We announce to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has made himself visible to us: we write this to you, so that you will have joy, \* and your joy may be perfect.

**V:** All this was written, so that you could believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and so that believing you may have life in his name.

**R:** and your joy may be perfect.

**Second Reading.** *Treat. 1: 1-3*

*The Life has manifested himself in the flesh.*

**A reading from the “Treatise on the first Letter of John” of St. Augustine, bishop.**

“That which was from the beginning. Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have touched, of the word of life.” Who is he that with his hands could touch the Word, were it not that “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us?” Now this Word which was made flesh that it might be handled, began to be flesh, in the Virgin Mary: but he did begin to be the Word then, for the Apostle says, “That which was from the beginning.” See whether his epistle does not bear witness to his gospel, where you have now heard, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. Perhaps someone will take the expression “the Word of life” as being referred to Christ, but not to the body of Christ touched with the hand. But pay attention to what follows: “the Life was made visible” Christ therefore is “the Word of life.”

And how was he made visible? He existed from the beginning, but had not yet been manifested to men; he had been manifested to the angels and was like their food. But what does Scripture say? “Man ate the bread of angels” (Ps. 77: 25)

Therefore Life itself was made visible in the flesh; it manifested itself so that which could be visible only to the heart, could become visible also

to the eyes and could heal the hearts. For only the heart sees the Word: but the flesh is seen by the bodily eyes also. Therefore the condition for seeing the Word is verified also: the Word became flesh, so that we could see him and could be healed in us that which renders us capable of seeing the Word

He says: We give witness and announce to you the eternal life, that was with the Father and has been made visible to us”, that is, has been made visible among us (1 Jn. 1: 2); or better, has manifested himself to us.

“Therefore that which we have seen and heard, is what we announce to you also”. (1 Jn. 1: 3) Comprehend well our love: “That which we have seen and heard, we announce to you also” they saw the Lord himself present in the flesh and they listened to the words from the mouth of the Lord and they announced them to us. Therefore we also have heard, but we have not seen.

Are we therefore less fortunate than those who have seen and heard? And how is it then that he adds: “So that you also may be in communion with us”? (1 Jn. 1: 3). They have seen, we no, yet we are in communion, because we have a common faith.

Our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. These things we write to you so that your joy may be perfect (cfr. 1 Jn. 1: 3 – 4) he affirms the fullness of joy in the same communion, in the same love, in the same unity.

### **Responsorial.**

**R:** Behold John, who during the dinner placed his head on the breast of the Lord: \* blessed apostle, to him was revealed the mystery of God.

**V:** From the heart of Christ himself he drew the living water of the gospel:

**R:** blessed apostle, to whom was revealed the mystery of God.

Or.

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 2: 1 – 5*

*He was loved by Christ.*



## **A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Cromazio of Aquileia, bishop**

John was the youngest of all the disciples of the Lord, the youngest in age, but already old through faith, and the gospel places him among the first: when the Lord wants to take aside a small group of apostles, among these there was always John. When he enters into the house of the head of the synagogue in order to recall to life the dead girl, with Peter and James he chooses John: he wanted these three to be the witnesses of that resurrection. And he did this for two reasons, be it because the divine law had already said: “Everything should be resolved on the word of two or three witnesses” (Dt. 19: 15; Mt. 18: 16), be it because no one can rise from the dead if not through the faith and through the grace of the Trinity.

The Lord wanted the presence of three witnesses in the resurrection of the young girl in order to make known the mystery of the Trinity.

When on the mountain he wanted to manifest his glory to the disciples, with Peter and James he took with him John. He leads these three “aside on a high mountain. And he was transfigured in front of them; and behold Moses and Elijah appeared to them” (Mt. 17: 1 –3). And the voice of the Father was heard from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him” (Mt. 17: 5).

You see also here a mystery, through which the Son of God manifests himself as God of heaven, of the earth and of Sheol. From heaven the Father renders witness to the Son; from the earth three apostles are chosen; Moses is called as a witness from Sheol, because he has known death.

And so that no place would be absent from giving witness to Christ, Elijah who had not experienced death was called from heaven, so that God could have witnesses coming from every part and from every place: from heaven, from the earth, from paradise and from Sheol. Here also, among the first apostles, John is present.

Then in the time of the passion, when the Son of God hung on the cross for the salvation of the world, the Lord did not entrust his Mother to anyone else but John, saying to him: “Behold your Mother!” And to the Mother he had said: “Behold your Son!” (Jn. 19: 27, 26) He entrusted his holy Mother Mary to John, not because he was about to abandon her – he who protects everything with divine condescension and is the defender and protector of everyone – but in order to manifest his love towards her.

The Lord wanted to demonstrate his filial affection towards Mary, because he is the beginning of all love. Here also, therefore John was the chosen one among the other apostles. For the gifts that he possessed Christ loved him with a particular affection.

After the passion, at the announcement of the resurrection of the Lord, Peter and John run to see the sepulchre. John arrived first, though he did not enter in order to leave the precedence to Peter. He arrived running before Peter, because the love for Christ pushed him, but then he stops because of humility: he ran ahead because love urged him, he did not enter because of respect towards the first of the apostles, and in that way he saved the humility with regard to Peter and the faith in Christ.

St. John also wrote a gospel, and everyone knows its value and singular characteristics. The gospel according to John is necessary specially for the defence of the truth against the heresies, because it affirms openly the divinity of Christ and demonstrates that he is God.

Today is the feast of such a great apostle: we celebrate the memory with due honour, so that with the help of his prayers we may reach that eternal glory that God prepares for his saints.

**Responsorial.** *1 Jn. 3: 16; Rm. 5: 8*

**R:** From this we have known love: He gave his life for us; \* therefore we too must give our lives for the brothers.

**V:** God showed his love towards us because, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**R:** therefore we too must give our lives for the brothers.

**Gospel.** *Jn. 20: 2 – 8*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. John.**

[John 20:2] So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

[John 20:3] Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb.

[John 20:4] They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first;

[John 20:5] and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

[John 20:6] Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying,

[John 20:7] and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

[John 20:8] Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;

**Third Reading.** *Treat. 120: 6 – 9; 121: 1*

*He arrived first, but entered after.*

**A reading from the “Commentary on the Gospel of John” of St. Augustine, bishop.**

The day after the Sabbath is that which, in memory of the resurrection of the Lord, the Christians call “the day of the Lord” and that Matthew only, among the evangelists, has called the first day of the week (cfr. Mt. 28: 1). Mary of Magdala ran “to Peter and to the other apostle, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them: They have taken away the Lord from the sepulchre and we do not know where they have put him” (Jn. 20: 2). In some of the codices, even Greek, there is: they have taken away “my” Lord. It is a particular that is not without significance, which springs up from the affection and devotion of Mary of Magdala.

“Peter therefore went forth together with the other disciple, and they came to the sepulchre. Both of them ran together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first” (Jn. 20: 3 – 4). The repetition here is worthy of notice and of commendation for the way in which a return is made to what had previously been omitted, and yet is added just as if it followed in due order. For after having already said, “they came to the sepulchre,” he goes back to tell us how they came, and says, “so they ran both together,” etc. Where he shows that, by outrunning his companion, there came first to the sepulchre that other disciple, by whom he means himself, while he relates all as if speaking of another. He had arrived first, and entered afterwards.

“And he saw, and believed.” (Jn. 20: 8) Here some, by not giving due attention, suppose that John believed that Jesus had risen again; but there is no indication of this from the words that follow. For what does he mean by

immediately adding, “For as yet they did not understand the scripture, that is that He must rise again from the dead” (Jn. 20: 9)? He could not then have believed that He had risen again, when he did not as yet know that he had to rise again. What then did he see? What was it that he believed? What but this, that he saw the sepulchre empty, and believed what the woman had said, that He had been taken away from the tomb.

The Lord, it is true, had spoken many times of his resurrection, in a very clear manner also, but they, accustomed as they were to hearing him speak in parables, had not understood, or had believed that he was referring to something else.

Mary of Magdala had gone to tell the disciples Peter and John that he had been removed from the sepulchre. Arriving at the sepulchre, they had found only the linen clothes in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped; and what else could they believe but what Mary had told them and what she herself had believed?

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Jn. 13: 25; 21: 20*

**R:** This is the most blessed evangelist and apostle John, \* who because of a particular privilege of love, merited to be honoured more than the others.

**V:** This is the disciple whom Jesus loved, he who during the dinner laid his head on the breast of Jesus.

**R:** who because of a particular privilege of love, merited to be honoured more than the others.

**28<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

## HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

### FEAST

**First Reading.** *Ex. 1: 8 – 16, 22*

*The killing of the Hebrew babies in Egypt.*

**A reading from the book of Exodus.**

[Exo 1:8] Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

[Exo 1:9] And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.

[Exo 1:10] Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

[Exo 1:11] Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Ram'ses.

[Exo 1:12] But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.

[Exo 1:13] So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor,

[Exo 1:14] and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor.

[Exo 1:15] Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiph'rah and the other Pu'ah,

[Exo 1:16] "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, she shall live."

[Exo 1:22] Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Is. 65: 19; Ap. 21: 4,5*

**R:** Joy for my people, \*the sound of crying and the cry of anguish will not be heard anymore.

**V:** There will not be death anymore, nor mourning, or lamentation, or pain:  
I will make all things new;

**R:** the sound of crying and the cry of anguish will not be heard anymore.

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 2 on the Creed.*

*They still did not speak and already they confessed Christ.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Quodvultdus, bishop.**

The great king is born as a tiny infant. Wise men are led to him from afar. They come to adore one who still lies in a manger but reigns over heaven and earth. When the wise men announce the birth of a king, Herod is troubled and wants to kill him, lest he should lose his own throne. And yet if he believed in him he would reign here securely, and in the life beyond would reign without end.

Herod, why are you afraid when you hear that the king has been born? He does not come to usurp your place; he comes to conquer the devil. But you do not understand this and so you are in a frenzy, mad with rage. And your determination to destroy the one infant whom you seek makes you inhumanly indifferent to the deaths of so many others.

No pity for sorrowing mothers deters you, no sympathy for fathers weeping as their sons are carried to the grave. Nor are you held back by the sobs and crying of the little victims themselves. You slay those little ones because fear in your heart slays you. You think, “If only I succeed in my purpose, mine will be long life”. But in reality you are seeking to murder Life itself.

He, the source of grace, small yet immense, lies in a manger, and terrifies you on your throne. Unknown too you, he works through you to complete his plans and to free souls from captivity to the devil. Already he has received the children of his enemies into the company of his adopted sons.

Though they know it not, these children die for Christ and their parents are mourning the death of martyrs. The Christ-child has made babies, who are unable to talk, fitting witnesses to himself. This is how he reigns who had come to reign in no other way. Already the liberator sets free, the Saviour offers salvation.

Herod, in your ignorance of this you rage and tremble. But, unknown to you, even as you rage against the little one you are serving him.

How great was the grace thus bestowed! Not through merits of their own did those infants conquer the great adversary. They could not speak, yet they confessed Christ. Helpless to enter the battle, they still carried off the palm of victory.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Ap. 4: 10; 7: 1*

**R:** Prostrated, they adore the one who lives forever and ever, \* laying their crowns in front of the throne of the Lord.

**V:** They fell on their faces in front of the throne, and praised the one who lives forever and ever,

**R:** laying their crowns in front of the throne of the Lord.

Or.

**Second Reading.** *Lett. 58: 6 – 7*

*The age that was not ready for battle was ready for the crown.*

**A reading from the “Letters” of St. Cyprian, bishop.**

The birth of Christ was immediately followed by the martyrdom of the babies, killed because of him in the first two years of life. The age that was unfit for battle was ready for the crown. The innocent infants were killed, so that the innocence of those who suffer death for Christ could appear. It was demonstrated that no one is immune from the danger of persecution, if even those babies suffered martyrdom.

What serious fault it would be for a Christian, servant of Christ, to not want to suffer when Christ was the first to suffer, and we not wanting to suffer for our sins, when He who did not have any sins has suffered for us. The Son of God has faced the passion in order to make us also sons of God, and the son of man does not want to suffer, and with this he renounces to being a Son of God! If we have to suffer because the world hates us, Christ was the first to suffer the hate of the world; if we have to support the derision or the flight or the torments, the Creator and the Lord of the world supported even more serious sufferings, and he admonishes us: “If the world hates you, know that it hated me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love that which belonged to it; since however you are not of the world, but I have chosen you from the world, for this the world hates you. Remember the words that I have said to you: a servant is

not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (Jn. 15: 18 – 20).

The Lord our God, also did what he taught us, so that the disciple who learns and does not do, would not have an excuse.

None of you, beloved brothers, should be frightened by the fear of a future persecution or by the coming of the Antichrist who is about to appear. Do not be afraid in such a way as to not be found already well armed and prepared for everything by the exhortation of the gospel and by the precepts and admonishments that descend from on high.

The Antichrist will come, but the Christ will also come. The enemy will rage with every type of cruelty, but the Lord will come immediately to vindicate our sufferings and our wounds. The adversary will get angry and threaten but there is He who can liberate us from his hands. We must fear Him from whose anger no one can flee: he himself warns us in anticipation: “Do not fear those who kill the body, but do not have power to kill the soul” (Mt. 10: 28).

**Responsorial.** *Wis. 4: 14, 15; Rm. 8: 28*

**R:** He removes them in a hurry from the wicked environment; \* in fact the grace and mercy of God are for his elect and protection for his saints.

**V:** Everything contributes to the good of those who have been called according to his plan;

**R:** in fact the grace and mercy of God are for his elect and protection for his saints.

**Gospel.** *Mt. 2: 13 – 18*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

[Mat 2:13] Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

[Mat 2:14] And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt,

[Mat 2:15] and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."



[Mat 2:16] Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.

[Mat 2:17] Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

[Mat 2:18] "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more."

**Third Reading. Disc. 1: 10**

*They are in front of the Lamb and contemplate his glory.*

**A reading from the "Discourses" of St. Bede the Venerable, presbyter.**

Dearest brothers, the reading of the gospel on the precious death of the Innocents, martyrs of Christ, is sacred for us, and recalls our minds to the glorious death of all the martyrs. That the Innocents were killed as babies has a significance for us: the glory of martyrdom is reached through humility and only the one who has converted and become like a child can give his life for Christ.

For this, dearest brothers, it is necessary that in the festivities of today, venerating the first fruits of the martyrs, reflecting attentively on the eternal feast that is celebrated for all martyrs in heaven, following as much as we can their footsteps, let us also try to participate in their joy. The Apostle assures us that as we have participated in their sufferings so also will we share in their consolation.

And let us not deplore their death, but rather let us rejoice, because they have received the palm that they merit. When each one of them died in the midst of torments, Rachael, that is the Mother Church, accompanied them with mourning and tears; but the heavenly Jerusalem, who is the mother of all of us, with signs of joy welcomed immediately those who had been expelled from the earth, and introduced them into the glory of their Lord, so that they could receive the crown from him. For this John says that "they were in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, wrapped in spotless white garments, and they carried palms in their hands" (Ap. 7: 9). Now they stand in front of the throne of God surrounded by their crowns, they who before lay, crushed by suffering, in front of the seat of the earthly judges.

They are in the presence of the Lamb and can never be expelled for any reason from the contemplation of his glory, as down here not even the torments could dissuade them from loving him.

They shine in white garments, they carry in their hands the palms as a reward for their works, and receive their bodies glorified by the resurrection, that out of love for the Lord they let the fire burn, the beasts to tear apart, to be destroyed by scourging, to be thrown into the ravines, to be stripped of the flesh by iron claws, to be killed with every sort of punishment.

“And they cry out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb” (Ap. 7: 10). They praise with a great voice the salvation of God and with living thanksgiving recognise that they have overcome the oppression of their enemies not by their own strength, but through the divine help. “They are the ones who have passed through the great tribulation and they have washed their garments rendering them spotless in the blood of the Lamb” (Ap. 7: 14). The martyrs have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb when their members seemed to the eyes of the fools to be smeared with the blood of their wounds, while they were purifying them from every stain by pouring out their blood for Christ, and they rendered them worthy of the blessed light of immortality because they had already washed them in the blood of the Lamb. “For this they are in front of the throne of God and they serve him day and night in his sanctuary” (Ap. 7: 15).

It is not a tiring service, but pleasant and desirable to stay in the presence of God and to praise him uninterruptedly: here the expression “day and night” does not exactly mean the succession of time, but indicates symbolically endurance. “There will be no more night” (Ap. 21: 25) in the dwellings of Christ, but only one unique day, happier than thousand elsewhere, a day in which Rachael will not cry anymore for her children because “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Ap. 7: 17); and he will give them “voices of joy and victory in their tents” (Ps. 117: 15), He who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

**Responsorial.** *Ap. 3: 4; 7: 14*

**R:** They have not stained their garments; \* they will escort me in white garments, because they are worthy.

**V:** They have washed their garments making them white with the blood of the Lamb.

**R:** they will escort me in white garments, because they are worthy.

**29<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

# FIFTH DAY OF THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

## CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *Col. 1: 1 – 14*

*Action of grace and prayer.*

**A reading from the Letter to the Colossians of St. Paul, apostle.**

[Col 1:1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

[Col 1:2] To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colos'sae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

[Col 1:3] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

[Col 1:4] because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints,

[Col 1:5] because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel

[Col 1:6] which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing -- so among yourselves, from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth,

[Col 1:7] as you learned it from Ep'aphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf

[Col 1:8] and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

[Col 1:9] And so, from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

[Col 1:10] to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

[Col 1:11] May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,

[Col 1:12] giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

[Col 1:13] He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

[Col 1:14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**Responsorial.** *Col. 1: 12, 13; Jn. 1: 17*

**R:** Let us give thanks with joy to the Father, who has freed us from the power of darkness, \* he has transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

**V:** Every good present and every perfect gift comes from on high and descends from the Father of light.

**R:** he has transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 1 for Epiphany 1 – 2*

*The fullness of divinity came in the fullness of time.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Bernard, abbot.**

“The kindness and humanity of God our Saviour appeared”. Thanks be to God, through whom our consolation overflows in this pilgrimage, in this exile, in this distress.

Before his humanity appeared, his kindness lay concealed. The latter indeed existed first, because the mercy of the Lord is from eternity. But how could men know it was so great? It was promised indeed, but not yet experienced: hence many did not believe in it. ‘The Lord’ indeed ‘spoke in fragmentary and varied fashion through the prophets’ saying ‘I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace and not of affliction’.

But what reply did man make, man who felt the affliction, and knew nothing of peace? How long will you keep saying, ‘Peace, peace, when there is no peace’? Therefore ‘The angels of peace were weeping bitterly’ saying ‘Lord who has believed your report?’ But now let men believe at least their own sight, because ‘the testimonies of God are become exceedingly credible’. ‘He has set his tabernacle in the sun’, so that it cannot escape even an eye that is troubled.

Behold, peace no longer promised, but conferred; no longer delayed but given; no longer predicted, but bestowed. Behold, God the Father has sent down to earth as it were a bag filled with his mercy; a bag to be rent open in the passion so that our ransom which it concealed might be poured out; a small bag indeed, but full. It is indeed a small child who is given to us, but in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead.

After the fullness of time had come, there came too the fullness of the Godhead. He came in the flesh, so that at least he may make himself

manifest to our earthly minds, so that when this humanity of his appeared, his kindness might also be acknowledged. Where the humanity of God appears, his kindness can no longer be hidden. In what way, indeed, could he have better commended his kindness than by assuming my flesh? My flesh, that is, not Adam's, as it was before the fall.

What greater proof could he have given of his mercy than by taking upon himself that which needed mercy? Where is there such fullness of loving kindness as in the fact that the Word of God became perishable like the grass for our sakes? 'Lord, what is man, that you make much of him or pay him any heed?'

Let man infer from this how much God cares for him. Let him know from this what God thinks of him, what he feels about him. Man, do not ask about your own sufferings; but about what he suffered. Learn from what he was made for you, how much he makes of you, so that his kindness may show itself to you from his humanity.

The lesser he has made himself in his humanity, the greater has he shown himself in kindness. The more he humbles himself on my account, the more powerfully he engages my love. 'The kindness and humanity of God our Saviour appeared' says the Apostle. The humanity of God shows the greatness of his kindness, and he who added humanity to the name of God gave great proof of his kindness.

**Responsorial.** *Ep. 1: 5 – 6; Rm. 8: 29*

**R:** God predestined us to be his adopted sons through Jesus Christ: this is his plan of love, \* to the praise and glory of his grace.

**V:** He knew us even before we existed, and he predestined us to be formed in the image of his Son;

**R:** to the praise and glory of his grace.

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Sg. of Songs. 1: 1 – 8*

*The Church the bride of Christ the King desires his love.*

**Beginning of the Song of Songs.**

[Song 1:1] The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

[Song 1:2] O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine,

[Song 1:3] your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is oil poured out; therefore the maidens love you.

[Song 1:4] Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you.

[Song 1:5] I am very dark, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.

[Song 1:6] Do not gaze at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has scorched me. My mother's sons were angry with me, they made me keeper of the vineyards; but, my own vineyard I have not kept!

[Song 1:7] Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who wanders beside the flocks of your companions?

[Song 1:8] If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents.

**Responsorial.** *Sg. of Songs. 4: 7 – 8; Jer. 31: 3*

**R:** You are beautiful, my friend, there is no stain in you. \* Come with me from Lebanon, o bride, come.

**V:** I have loved you with an eternal love, for this I still conserve you with mercy.

**R:** Come with me from Lebanon, o bride, come.

**Second Reading.** *Hom 1*

*We rejoice and are happy for You.*

**A reading from the “Homilies on the Song of Songs” of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.**

In as much, according to the counsel of Paul, you have undressed yourselves of the old man with his works and his desires, like a sordid garment, and with the purity of life you have re-clothed yourselves with the clothes of the Lord, splendid as he showed them on the mountain of the transfiguration; in as much, therefore, by means of charity that is his garment, you have re-clothed yourselves with Jesus Christ himself our Lord

and to him you have conformed yourselves in order to be similar to him in impassibility, listen to the mystery of the Song of Songs.

These young girls who have grown in virtue and, because of their age, have already entered into the nuptial chamber of the mystical wedding, love the bridegroom for his beauty and with their love they attract his gaze. The bridegroom in fact, does not remain insensible to this love and responds to their desire. He says, in fact, through the mouth of Wisdom: “I love those who love me” (Pr. 8: 17).

The souls, as it is written, who follow the Lord God, attract to themselves the love of that bridegroom who is not subject to death.

The fragrance of a perfume kindles their love, behind which they rush forgetting what they leave behind, always running towards that for which they yearn: We run – he says – behind you, in the fragrance of your perfumes (Sg of Sgs. 1: 3).

The soul, having reached a higher grade of perfection, is stretched out with greater ardour towards the object of its desire, therefore it immediately reaches the object for which it has run, and it is retained worthy of the most hidden treasures.

It has desired to touch with its lips the happiness and to draw at least so much beauty as is the intensity of its desire: for this it asks ardently to be made worthy – like a kiss of the Word – of the grace of his illumination.

Having obtained it, and penetrated more profoundly into the mystery through contemplation, it exclaims with exultation of not having found itself only in the vestibule, but of having the first fruits of the Spirit, which through his grace, as with a kiss, has rendered it worthy of scrutinising the depths of God, and of seeing and hearing on the threshold of paradise, as the apostle Paul says: “things that the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard” (1 Cor. 2: 9), that is not permitted for anyone to pronounce.

The words that follow introduce us into the mystery of the Church.

In fact those who were the first to be illuminated by the grace and who were the first to hear the Word and to serve him, did not enclose jealously inside themselves these riches, but transmitted the same grace to posterity.

For this, to the bride who is the first to be filled with delight, and had the privilege of entering into the room of the bridegroom and of hearing from his own mouth those inexpressible words, the young girls say: “We are glad and rejoice for you” (Sg. of Sgs. 1: 4)



**Responsorial.** *Sg. Of Sgs. 5: 16; Gal. 2: 20*

**R:** He is all delight, this is my beloved, \* this is my friend, o daughters of Jerusalem.

**V:** It is not anymore I who live, but Christ lives in me.

**R:** This is my friend, o daughters of Jerusalem.

**Gospel.** *Lk. 2: 22 – 35*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.**

[Luke 2:22] And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

[Luke 2:23] (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")

[Luke 2:24] and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

[Luke 2:25] Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

[Luke 2:26] And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

[Luke 2:27] And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law,

[Luke 2:28] he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

[Luke 2:29] "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;

[Luke 2:30] for mine eyes have seen thy salvation

[Luke 2:31] which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,

[Luke 2:32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

[Luke 2:33] And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him;

[Luke 2:34] and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against

[Luke 2:35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

**30<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

## SIXTH DAY OF THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

### CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *Col. 1: 15 – 2: 3*

*Christ, the Head of the Church, and Paul his servant.*

**A reading from the Letter to the Colossians of St. Paul, apostle.**

[Col 1:15] He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation;

[Col 1:16] for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him.

[Col 1:17] He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

[Col 1:18] He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.

[Col 1:19] For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell,

[Col 1:20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[Col 1:21] And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

[Col 1:22] he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him,

[Col 1:23] provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

[Col 1:24] Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,

[Col 1:25] of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

[Col 1:26] the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints.

[Col 1:27] To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

[Col 1:28] Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.

[Col 1:29] For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.

## CHAPT

### ER 2

[Col 2:1] For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at La-odice'a, and for all who have not seen my face,

[Col 2:2] that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ,

[Col 2:3] in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

### **Responsorial.** *Col. 1: 18, 17*

**R:** Christ is the head of the body that is the Church, the first born of all those who rise from the dead; \* his is the pre-eminence over all things.

**V:** He is the first of all things, and all things exist in him.

**R:** his is the pre-eminence over all things.

### **Second Reading.** *C. 10, 33 – 34*

*The Word who became man makes us similar to God.*

**A reading from the treatise “The confutation of all heresies” of St. Hippolytus, presbyter.**

We do not put our faith in empty phrases, we are not carried off by sudden impulses of the heart, we are not seduced by plausible and eloquent speech, - but we do not refuse belief to words spoken by divine power.

These God committed to the Word. The Word spoke, and by these words he turned man away from disobedience, not enslaving him by force or necessity, but inviting him to choose freedom of his own accord.

In the last days the Father sent the Word. In his plan the Word was no longer to speak through the prophets. He was no longer to be a figure of conjecture, announced in an obscure way. He was to be manifested visibly, so that the world could see him and be saved.

We know that the Word assumed a body from a virgin and, through a new creation, put on our old nature. We know that he was a man, formed from the same substance as we are. If he were not of the same nature as us, his command to imitate him as a master would be a futile one. If he was of a different substance, why does he command me, naturally weak as I am, to do as he did? How can he be good and just?

To show that he was not different from us, he undertook hard work, he went hungry and thirsty, he took rest and sleep, he did not shirk suffering, he revealed the resurrection. In all this he offered his own self, so that when you suffered you would not lose heart, but rather would recognise that you are a man, and would yourself expect to receive what he received from God.

When you have learned to know the true God, you will have a body immortal and incorruptible, like your soul; you will gain the kingdom of heaven, you who lived on earth and knew the king of heaven; freed from passion, suffering and disease, you will be a companion of God and co-heir with Christ, for you have become a god.

All that you had to suffer as a man, God gave you, because you were a man. All that belongs to God, he has promised to give you, because you have been deified and have become immortal. This is what it means to know yourself, to recognise the God who made you: to know and to be known is the lot of the man called by God.

And so, men, do not be hostile to one another, do not hesitate to return. Christ who is God, supreme over all, has arranged to wash man clean of sin and to make our old nature new. From the beginning he called this old nature his image, and in this way gave you a sign of his love for you. If you obey his sacred commandments, if you become a good follower of him who is good, you will become like him, he will honour you. God is not lacking in anything, and he made you also a god for his glory.

**Responsorial.** *Jn. 1: 14; Bar. 3: 38*

**R:** The Word became flesh and came to live in the midst of us: and we have contemplated his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten Son of the Father, \* full of grace and truth.

**V:** He appeared on earth and has lived among men.

**R:** full of grace and truth.

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Sg of Songs. 2: 1 – 7, 1: 9 – 17*

*Colloquy of the Bridegroom and the Bride  
That is of Christ and the Church.*

**A reading from the Song of Songs.**

[Song 2:1] I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

[Song 2:2] As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens.

[Song 2:3] As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

[Song 2:4] He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

[Song 2:5] Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am sick with love.

[Song 2:6] O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!

[Song 2:7] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

[Song 1:9] I compare you, my love, to a mare of Pharaoh's chariots.

[Song 1:10] Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels.

[Song 1:11] We will make you ornaments of gold, studded with silver.

[Song 1:12] While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance.

[Song 1:13] My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts.

[Song 1:14] My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Enge'di.

[Song 1:15] Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.

[Song 1:16] Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely. Our couch is green;

[Song 1:17] the beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are pine.

**Responsorial.** *Sg. of Sgs. 2: 3; Ps. 15: 11*

**R:** In his longed for shade, I sit. \* His fruit is sweet to my palate.

**V:** Fullness of joy in his presence, sweetness without end at his right hand.

**R:** His fruit is sweet to my palate.

**Second Reading.** *Hom. 2*

*How can I not love you who loved me so much?*

**A reading from the “Homilies on the Song of Songs” of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.**

“Tell me, o love of my soul, where do you go to pasture the flock, where do you make it rest at midday so that I may not be like a vagabond going after the flocks of your companions” (Sg. of Sgs. 1: 7). Where do you go to pasture, o good shepherd, you who carry the entire flock on your shoulders? Is not perhaps, that unique lamb, the whole of the human race that you have placed on your shoulders? Show me the place of rest, lead me to the rich pastures; call me by name so that I, your lamb, may listen to your voice, and, on the strength of your word, give me eternal life: reveal yourself to me, o love of my soul!

I call you in this manner, because your name is above every other name and every intelligence, and reasoning beings are not capable of expressing it and of understanding it. Your name, which expresses your goodness, is the tenderness of my soul for you. How can I not love you who, even though I am “dark”, have loved me so much as to give your life for the sheep that you pasture? A greater love than this cannot be conceived: that you have given your life in exchange for mine. Show me, therefore, where you go to pasture the flock so that, finding the pastures of salvation, I can satisfy myself with the heavenly food: he who does not eat it, in fact, cannot enter into the eternal life; and running to the spring, I can drink of the divine water that you offer to those who are thirsty, water that gushes out from

your side, from the wound opened by the lance, water that, in he who has tasted it, “becomes spring that gushes to eternal life” (Jn. 4: 14).

If you take me to pasture among your sheep, you will certainly make me rest at midday: together we will rest in a light without shadow, because it will be full midday, shining with all the splendour of the sun, there where you make those whom you have satisfied rest, when with you, in your rooms, you will receive your children. But to no one but he who is a son of light, son of the day, will be granted that afternoon rest. Show me therefore – he says – where we have to rest and where they pasture, which is the way that leads to the afternoon rest, so that, ignoring the truth, I may not detach myself from your hand and that I may not unite myself to other flocks that are strangers to yours.

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 41: 2 – 3; 54: 7*

**R:** Like a deer yearns for running streams, so my soul yearns for you, O God. \* My soul is thirsting for God, the living God, when can I come and see the face of God?

**V:** Who will give me the wings of the dove, to fly and to find rest?

**R:** My soul is thirsting for God, the living God, when can I come and see the face of God?

**Gospel.** *Lk. 2: 36 – 40*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.**

[Luke 2:36] And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phan'u-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity,

[Luke 2:37] and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

[Luke 2:38] And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

[Luke 2:39] And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.

[Luke 2:40] And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.



**31<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER**

# SEVENTH DAY OF THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

## CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *Col. 2: 4 – 15*

*Our faith in Christ.*

**A reading from the Letter to the Colossians of St. Paul, apostle.**

[Col 2:4] I say this in order that no one may delude you with beguiling speech.

[Col 2:5] For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

[Col 2:6] As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him,

[Col 2:7] rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

[Col 2:8] See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.

[Col 2:9] For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily,

[Col 2:10] and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

[Col 2:11] In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ;

[Col 2:12] and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

[Col 2:13] And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

[Col 2:14] having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

[Col 2:15] He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Col. 2: 9 – 10, 12*

**R:** The fullness of God dwells bodily in Christ: he is the Lord of all the earthly and heavenly powers; \* you have a share of his fullness.

**V:** Buried together with him in baptism, resurrected together with him, through faith in the power of God,

**R:** you have a share of his fullness.

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 6 for the Nativity 2 – 3, 5*

*The Birth of the Lord is the birth of peace.*

**A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Leo the Great, pope.**

The infancy that the Son of God did not think beneath his glory, grew over the years to mature manhood. When the triumph of his passion and resurrection was completed, all the actions of humility that were undertaken for us ceased. However, today’s feast renews for us the holy infancy of Jesus born of the Virgin Mary. And as we adore the birth of our Saviour we find that we are celebrating our own beginnings.

For the birth of Christ is the origin of the people of Christ, and the birthday of the head is the birthday of the body.

It is true that each of those who are called is allotted a particular place, and that all the children of the Church are separated from each other by intervals of time. However, just as all the faithful together, born of the waters of baptism, are crucified with Christ in his passion, raised with him in his resurrection, and given a place with him at the Father’s right hand in his ascension, so too, with him they are born in this his birth.

Throughout the world, every one of the faithful is reborn in Christ, and leaving the path of his old origins passes by rebirth into a new man. No longer is he reckoned among his human father’s stock but among the seed of the Saviour, who became the Son of man in order that we might have the power to be the sons of God.

If he had not come down to us by this humility, no one could have come to him by any merits of his own.

Hence the very greatness of the gift conferred demands of us reverence worthy of its splendour. As the blessed Apostle teaches, ‘ we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God’. He can in no other way be rightly worshipped, except by offering him what he himself bestowed on us.

But, in the treasury of the Lord's generosity what can we find more suitable to honour the present feast than the peace first proclaimed by the angels' chorus at the Lord's nativity?

Peace it is that gives birth to the sons of God. Peace is the nurse of love, the mother of unity, the repose of the blessed, and our eternal home. The real work and special blessing of peace is to join to God those whom it sets apart from the world.

Let those then who are born neither of blood nor of the will of the flesh or of the will of man but of God, offer to the Father the oneness of heart of peace-loving sons. Let all the members of adoption come together in the first-born of the new creation, who came not to do his own will but the will of him who sent him. The grace of the Father has not adopted as his heirs those who are divided among themselves and at odds with each other, but those who are one in mind and heart. Remodelled according to the one image, they should have a spirit in conformity with it.

The birthday of the Lord is the birthday of peace. As the Apostle says, 'He is our peace, who made us both one'. For, whether we be Jew or Gentile, 'through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

**Responsorial.** *Ep. 2: 13 – 14, 17*

**R:** You who used to be far away, have been brought close thanks to the blood of Christ. He is our peace, \* he who has made of the two only one people.

**V:** He came to announce peace, peace to you who were far away, peace to those who were near.

**R:** he who has made of the two only one people.

CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Sg. of Songs 2: 8 – 3: 5*

*The Bride searches for the Bridegroom whose voice she has heard.*

**A reading from the Song of Songs.**

[Song 2:8] The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

[Song 2:9] My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

[Song 2:10] My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;

[Song 2:11] for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

[Song 2:12] The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

[Song 2:13] The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

[Song 2:14] O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely.

[Song 2:15] Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

[Song 2:16] My beloved is mine and I am his, he pastures his flock among the lilies.

[Song 2:17] Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle, or a young stag upon rugged mountains.

## CHAPT

### ER 3

[Song 3:1] Upon my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer.

[Song 3:2] "I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves." I sought him, but found him not.

[Song 3:3] The watchmen found me, as they went about in the city. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"

[Song 3:4] Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

[Song 3:5] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please.

**Responsorial.** *Sag. Of Sgs. 2: 10, 14; Ps. 44: 11, 12*

**R:** Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come! \* Your voice is sweet, and your face is comely.

**V:** Listen, my daughter, give ear: your beauty is pleasing to the king.

**R:** Your voice is sweet, and your face is comely.

**Second Reading.** *Hom. 5*

*God has manifested himself in the flesh.*

**A reading from the “Homilies on the Song of Songs” of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.**

“Behold he comes, leaping over the mountains” (Sg. of Sgs. 2: 8). What is hidden in these words? Perhaps that which is revealed in the Gospel: the plan of the manifestation of the Word of God, already announced before hand by the prophets and realised with the appearance of the Lord in the flesh. “Behold, he is behind our wall: he looks from the window, he peers through the grating” (Sg. of Sgs. 2: 9b). Prayer unites our human nature to God, after having illuminated it through the prophets and the law. And thus in the windows we see hidden the prophets who open the passage to the light; in the grating the wholeness of the precepts of the law: through one and the other the splendour of the true light enters. But full light was when the true light appears, through his union with the human nature, to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

First of all, therefore, the rays of the prophetic visions, enlightening the mind and received in the mind through the windows and the gratings, infuses in us the desire of seeing the sun in the open sky; immediately afterwards, the object of desire becomes reality. “Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come, o my dove!” (Sg. of Sgs. 2: 13 – 14). How much truth does the Word reveal to us in these few words! We see the Word who attracts to himself the bride from virtue to virtue, like over the steps of a staircase. First of all, he sends a ray of his light through the prophetic windows and the gratings, which is the precepts of the law, and he invites her to draw near to the light that makes her as beautiful as a luminous dove. Then when she has received in herself all the beauty of which she is capable, again, as if until now he had not communicated any good, he attracts her to a more elevated participation, in a way that the state already reached alights further her desire, and because of the splendour of the

beauty by which she sees herself dominated, she has the impression of being just at the beginning of the climb towards God.

For this, after having awakened her, he says again: Arise; and then again: Come. To the one in fact who has truly arisen once, will certainly not lack the possibility of rising again, and for the one who runs towards the Lord, the long and difficult journey in order to reach him will never be completely accomplished. It is necessary to always get up and to be in listening, nor ever to stop running, even if we are near to the destination. Every time that he says: Arise and come, he also gives the grace to climb always higher.

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 35: 10; 1 Cor. 13: 12*

**R:** In you is the source of life. \* In your light we see the light.

**V:** Now we see as if in a mirror, in a confused manner, but then we will see him face to face.

**R:** In your light we see the light.

**Gospel.** *Jn. 1: 1 – 18*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. John.**

[John 1:1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[John 1:2] He was in the beginning with God;

[John 1:3] all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

[John 1:4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

[John 1:5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

[John 1:6] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

[John 1:7] He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.

[John 1:8] He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

[John 1:9] The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

[John 1:10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.

[John 1:11] He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.

[John 1:12] But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God;

[John 1:13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

[John 1:14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

[John 1:15] (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, `He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'")

[John 1:16] And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace.

[John 1:17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

[John 1:18] No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.