

SSS NEWSDESK SRI LANKA

Blessed Sacrament Congregation



**“Christ the Bread of Life”
SSS in Sri Lanka.**

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Editorial Board: Rev. Fr. Nilindra Guneseķera sss.
Rev. Fr. Sagara Jayamanne sss.
Rev. Fr. Roger Fernando sss.

EDITORIAL

The Season of Advent



In Advent, Christians re-live a dual impulse of the spirit: on the one hand, they raise their eyes towards the final destination of their pilgrimage through history, which is the glorious return of the Lord Jesus; on the other, remembering with emotion his birth in Bethlehem, they kneel before the Crib.

The hope of Christians is turned to the future but remains firmly rooted in an event of the past. In the fullness of time, the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary: "Born of a woman, born under the law", as the Apostle Paul writes (Gal 4: 4).

Advent is a time of waiting, conversion and of hope:

- waiting-memory of the first, humble coming of the Lord in our mortal flesh; waiting-supplication for His final, glorious coming as Lord of History and universal Judge;
- conversion, to which the Liturgy at this time often refers quoting the prophets, especially John the Baptist, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2);
- joyful hope that the salvation already accomplished by Christ (cf. Rm 8:24-25) and the reality of grace in the world, will mature and reach their fulness, thereby

granting us what is promised by faith, and "we shall become like Him for we shall see Him as He really is" (John 3:2).

Popular piety is particularly sensitive to Advent, especially when seen as the memory of the preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The Christian people are deeply conscious of the long period of expectation that preceded the birth of our Savior. The faithful know that God sustained Israel's hope in the coming of the Messiah by the prophets. Popular piety is not unaware of this extraordinary event. Indeed, it is awestruck at the prospect of the God of glory taking flesh in the womb of the humble and lowly Virgin Mary. The faithful are particularly sensitive to the difficulties faced by the Virgin Mary in the process of the Incarnation, and are deeply moved by the fact that there was no room at the inn for Joseph and Mary, just as she was about to give birth to the Christ child (cf Lk 2:7). Today, Internally Displaced Persons/Families are contextual signs given to us, just as the sign given to the shepherds was a family for whom there was no room in the inn.



Therefore, popular piety must be transformed into "Obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5) which refers to faith expressed in obedience/ action in making a contextual response to the 'Divine Visitation', manifested 'then' in the family for whom there was no room in the inn, and 'now' in internally displaced families (cf. Mt. 25:35-45).

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 Rev. Fr. Nilindra Gunsekera sss.,
 Provincial Superior.

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BREAKING NEWS IN BRIEF

1. 25 Years of Service in the Matale Parish

- By Rev. Fr. Ignatius Saverimuttu sss



The Parish of Matale was established as an SSS Foundation in 1983. Hence, it is now 25 years since the SSS ventured into pastoral ministry in parishes. The Matale Foundation as we refer to it, is the Parish of St. Thomas' Church, Matale. Parish records demonstrate that the Catholic Community of Matale had been erected as a parish in 1873, that is 135 years ago. The Catholic Community has existed in Matale since 1708, for the past three centuries.

The Jubilee Year of the SSS Parish of Matale was inaugurated on the 1st November 2008, the Feast of All Saints. It was fitting that the Jubilee Year of the parish be inaugurated on All Saints Day, because the jubilee celebrated the faith of the believing community who had witnessed to the Lord Jesus for 300 years. It is noteworthy to recall how St. Paul always referred to the believing community as 'saints' (cf.).



Fr. Prasanna the first priest from Matale unfurls the Parish Flag alongside Fr. Herald, the Parish Priest.



Fr. Nilindra sss, the Provincial Superior unfurls the Catholic Flag





The Great Elevation at the Eucharist during the Inaugural Celebration of the Jubilee Year

2. Formation News

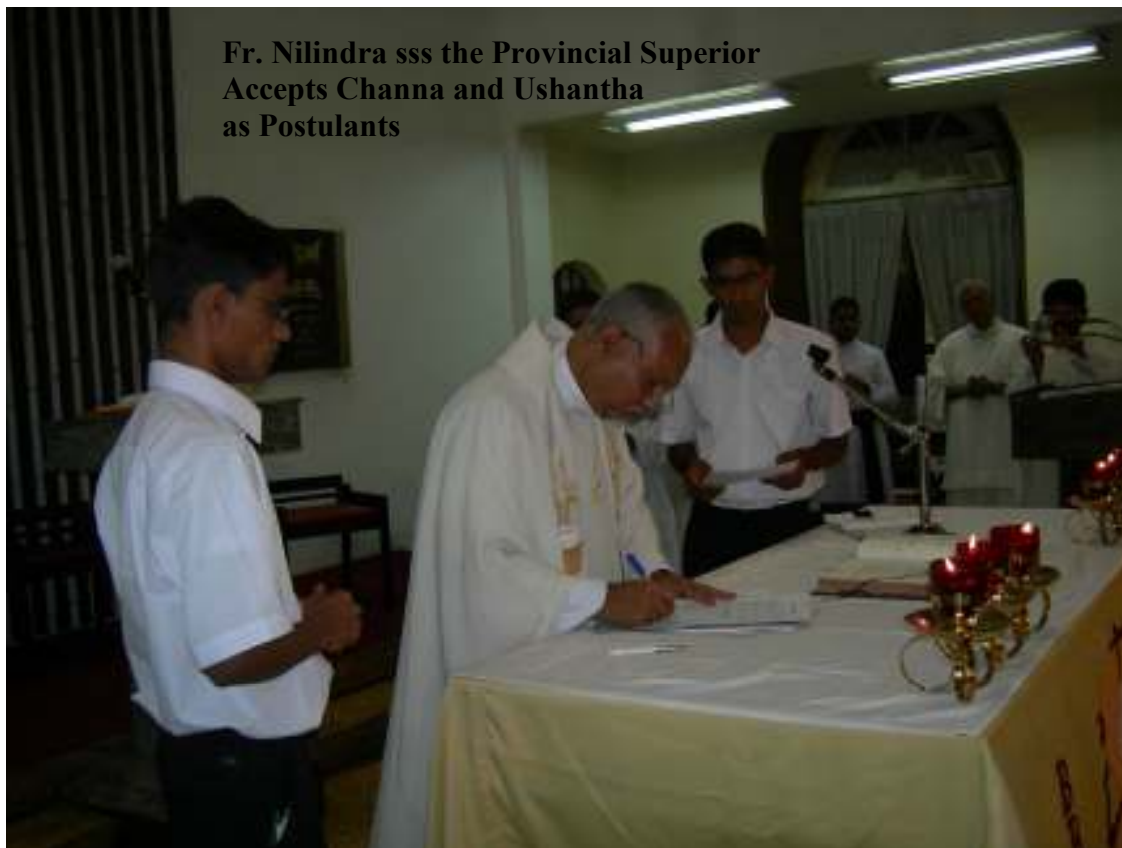
- By Bro. Rev. Br. Anthony Marcus sss



Vocation ministry directly impacts on the future of a Religious Congregation. Therefore, it is a priority. Vocation ministry is also necessary to foster 'vocations' which are gifts from God. With each new 'vocation' the Congregation is enriched because it strengthens the process of inculturation. Each new vocation is a guarantee that the Founder's Charism will be articulated in a unique manner during a particular period of the history of the Local Church of Sri Lanka. The words of the Master, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Mt. 9:37), remind us of the importance of vocation ministry. Hence, each new 'vocation' is a cause for rejoicing and celebration. It is proof of God's providence towards us, an affirmation of the need of the Founder's Charism in contemporary society, and the presence of individuals willing to respond to the divine call. When a new 'vocation' enters the Congregation he says publicly, "Here I am Lord, I come to do your will." It is a '*chairo*s (i.e. salvific) moment' in his life as well as in ours.



Dorington and Melraj seek permission to enter the Novitiate



**Fr. Nilindra sss the Provincial Superior
Accepts Channa and Ushantha
as Postulants**

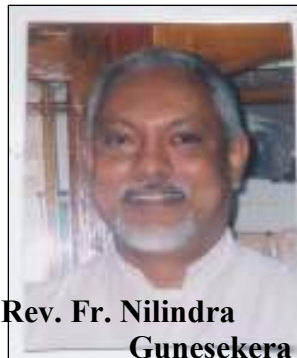


Gaston makes public his request to enter the Aspirancy in the presence of Rev. Fr. Nilindra sss the Provincial Superior



Fr. Christopher flanked by Ushantha, Channa (L) and Devanesan Marius (R) after Marius entered the Aspirancy

3. The Amplified General Council of SSS



- By Rev. Fr. Nilindra
Gunesequera SSS

I append here-below a summary of the address of the Superior General on the State of the Congregation. It contains valuable insights for Religious Life.

« Community and Mission »

Over the past decade there has been a constant emphasis of two themes intimately linked: the value of religious *community*, and the importance of a specific Eucharistic *mission* in the Church. Community and mission are words that recur continually. The emphasis on the ‘quality’ of community life bespeaks of a lifestyle of quality. The emphasis on lifestyle for mission, seeks to revitalize the spiritual and apostolic dynamism of our communities, and re-launch our SSS mission through giving quality to the religious life of our communities.

Yet, the evaluation of the lived experiences in the Provinces/Regions shows some imbalances between the requirements of brotherhood, prayer and service. This situation presents challenges that must be faced: a clarification of our specific SSS mission.

Having consulted the Provinces and Regions, the AGC, was asked to:

- 1) Make a list of where we are in realising our charism,
- 2) Highlight the key problems,
- 3) Look for means to enable us to go ahead in living our identity as a Congregation.

This reflection follows the outline of the questions sent for consultation: community, mission, community and mission with a description of our present situation as it emerges from the replies received from the Provinces and regions to the questionnaire sent in preparation for the AGC.

1. COMMUNITY

1.1. Community in Consecrated Life

We form an *Institute of an active apostolic* kind where community life becomes organized taking into account the apostolic project of the Institute.

The fraternal communion lived in community comprises two inseparable elements: *common life* (a structural element) and *fraternity* (a spiritual element). To be a

community it is necessary to live together, animated by an authentic spirit of fraternity, which comes about by sharing of values and is expressed in attitudes of mutual affective and effective good will.

Fraternal life in community is sustained and nourished above all by the *common means typical of the Consecrated Life*: reference to one's own founder and the specific patrimony of the Institute, loyal practice of the vows, community meetings for dialogue, discernment and decision making, the ministry of animation and guidance by the superior.

1.2. The SSS Community

Our SSS communities, following the example of the disciples who left all to follow Christ and the example of the community of Jerusalem, live the common life and fraternal relations as an extension of the Eucharist; this gives a particular feature to our way of living the meaning of community.

In these last years, particularly with the proposal of the Renewed Eucharistic Spirituality (RES), the importance of fraternal life in community has been highlighted as well as the concrete (ecclesial and religious) means to sustain, animate, and enliven it.

1.3. The Present Situation

What is the kind of 'vision' our religious have about an SSS community?

Some encouraging elements emerge: the conviction that the common life is finding its value within religious consecration that commits us to this. The conviction that the common life is based on a strong sense of belonging, on the participation of all in drawing up of a project, on fidelity to meetings and the rhythms of prayer. Confirmation about the richness of sharing our charism with the laity – this is a definite point gained.

There are also problematic elements that emerge: conflicts between personal and community projects, meetings of the community and weak leadership, few communal celebrations, little personal and communal prayer. The experience of a diminution of numbers and ageing, particularly in the 'old world', all this saps an enthusiasm of vision.

A consensus emerges on the basis of understanding *Renewed Eucharistic Spirituality (RES)*: fraternal life of the community is a dynamic element of our consecration and mission.



2. MISSION

2.1. The Mission of the Consecrated Life

Every religious community, even that which is more specifically contemplative, has by its apostolic nature a mission.

Religious families, in particular those of an active apostolic kind, express their proper mission at two levels: *witness* and *specific ministry*.¹

Witness

Witness constitutes for all religious and consecrated persons the primary apostolate, an apostolate carried out in the whole of living. This dimension of mission can be expressed by all without exception (by healthy and sick religious), in every season of life (whether in youth or old age). The mission of witnessing is both personal and communitarian. The most telling message of our communities is the witness of their lives” (Rule of Life 37).

Specific apostolate and ministry

Beyond the level of witnessing, Institutes of an active apostolic kind express the mission the Spirit has entrusted to them with standard forms of apostolate that can be set out in three general types:

- The apostolate that announces the Word: evangelisation;
- The apostolate that serves the Christian community: animation of dioceses, parishes, groups;
- The ministry of works of charity: relief of suffering, works of mercy, social commitment.

2.2. Consecrated Life and the Presbyterate

By its own nature consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay (Can. 588), being open to all the faithful. But in its concrete realization it becomes necessarily one or the other.

Already in the IVth and Vth centuries a process of clericalisation of monasticism began, and afterwards there was a process of making the clergy like monks. Following this, in the historical development of the various forms of consecrated life, it is the Spirit himself who raised up the charismatic experience of consecrated – priests.

We can distinguish with a great deal of simplification three types of consecrated priests. The *priest member of an Institute that started as secular* (e.g. the monastic community from its beginnings, the Fatebene Brothers, Bose). His vocation from the beginning is that of all his non priestly brethren. In this case we have a *religious-priest* who exercises his own priestly ministry basically to serve the needs of the religious community.

¹ “By our life and activities we share in the mission of the Church...” (RL 3).

A diametrically opposed situation is that of the *diocesan priest member of a Secular Institute*; for him the consecrated life is considered and lived in function and at the service of the diocesan priestly ministry.

Then there is the *priest member of an Institute that started in the clerical state* (e.g. Dominicans, Jesuits, the greater part of male Institutes dedicated to the works of the apostolate, among which we SSS are). The priesthood is within the context itself of the consecrated life, *embraced as an element at the service of the charism of the Institute*, and hence of the vocation and mission of those who have received the sacrament of holy orders.

Here the Consecrated Life becomes ‘complex’ because it embraces at the same time religious consecration and priestly consecration. The insertion of religious priests into the pastoral work of the diocese, and their necessary obedience to the bishop and their collaboration with all opens the theological problem concerning the *original identity of that complex vocation* in which are joined a calling to the priestly ministry and a calling to holiness in the consecrated life in the unity of a determined charism. At present we do not have yet a theological reflection and a mature synthesis of this. However, here are some conditions to safeguard the particular character of the priestly (and diakonal) ministry of a consecrated person.

- To bear witness to a spiritual experience that is inspired by the witness and teaching of their own *founder*, who constitutes also a source and model of being a religious-priest.
- To attain by their *spirituality* to the fountainheads of their own Institute, which concretise in a particular way the significance of being a consecrated-priest.
- To lead a life according to the pattern set out in their own *Rule of Life*, which they are committed to observe; this indicates a particular pattern about their entire existence and apostolic action
- To live in a *community* so that the ministry will be realized “together” and in obedience (being dependent on a superior).
- To express one’s own *charismatic specialization* regarding the activities, those to whom one ministers, ministerial competence (to be able to give appropriate responses to a situation from one’s own specific charism).

In conclusion, two brief statements can be made:

It is the Spirit himself who has raised up this charismatic experience of the consecrated-priests.

This particular challenge of the renewal of Consecrated Life of an apostolic and active kind consists in being able to express, even through the priestly ministry, the specific charism of the Institute.

2.3. Our Present Situation

We are aware of having a specific Eucharistic mission. However, in practice we express this still with little creativity. We have parishes and shrines; there are not lacking other ministries and related activities, but they are still proportionally too few and at times they are rather personal expressions than being those of the Institute.

We do not yet succeed in giving a particular character to every community, expressing thus the richness of the SSS mission in the overall reality of the Province/Region.

There are valuable experiences being carried out, however we must be encouraged to go ahead along this path to re-launch in a renewed way our 'traditional' works and open ourselves with courage and creativity to new expressions of our mission.

3. COMMUNITY AND MISSION

3.1. The Congregations of the XIXth Century

We are part of religious Congregations that arose in the XIXth century and that are characterized by two common elements. The first is the capacity to *identify and respond to social and ecclesial needs of a varied kind*. On the apostolic and charitable plane these Congregations express a noteworthy *specialisation* and initiative, insofar as they place a strong accent on the peculiar element of each Congregation: the *specific end*.

The second element is the *missionary thrust*, either for a work of re-evangelisation but above all to engage in missions *ad gentes*. Many Congregations of this epoch are consecrated to the work of first evangelisation (the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the White Fathers, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary...).

3.2. A Difficult Balance

The active apostolic life is a *consecration* to God for an *apostolic service* of his people. Religious apostles propose again in their own time the living presence of Christ, *consecrated* and an *apostle* of the Father, realising in themselves the *disciple* and *apostle*, the *consecrated* and *sent* person so that the whole of their life may be pervaded by his same apostolic spirit, and because their apostolate may be a witness of an authentic disciple. They live together in community a process of being gradually configured to Christ by means of a journey in which are interlaced the values and requirements of brotherhood, prayer and service. This is a difficult balance to attain.

3.3. Our Situation

The interaction between community and mission is one of the great challenges of living today in our communities. It is a challenge having important consequences, such as for example the question of the number of religious for a community in which implies our vision of relation between community and mission. One notes that the bond between the three dimensions of the *Renewed Eucharistic Spirituality* (fraternity, prayer, service) is still weak, moreover, some state that a vision is lacking in this interaction, perhaps because of a lack of formation.

In fact it happens that concretely living in community is seen as being together to do something rather than being together as a witness. Our apostolate risks levelling out to that of priests, but with the advantage of having more personnel than a normal parish. There lacks a balance between the requirements of the common life, prayer and apostolic ministry. One prevails over the other, but more often the demands of the apostolic ministry prevail.

At the same time can it be claimed that by taking up the challenge involving this interaction between community and mission, we are in the process of fashioning a *Renewed Eucharistic Spirituality* by beginning to mature in a new mentality?

4. TO START A PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT

A Broad Vision of Mission

The task of these years to construct *a lifestyle for mission* expresses also the awareness of *mission of a lifestyle of quality*. The accent is on the *quality of presence* rather than on the type of service. Pastoral activities find their true context within mission only when it is continually subjected to the evangelical purification of individualism, exhibitionism, seeking of success, and personalism.

A Challenge to be Taken up Positively

The challenge to harmonize the values and requirements of fraternity, prayer and service, belong to the very identity of apostolic religious Congregations. It is to be viewed as an opportunity that daily challenges us.



4. Annual Feasts

A. Corpus Christi at Allagollawa



- By Rev. Fr. Sagara
Jayamanne sss



Fr. Roger sss drives the chariot

B. Church Feast at Bandirippuwa



Bishop Valence imparts benediction

5. Silver Jubilee of Rev. Fr. Christopher sss



- By Rev. Fr. Nesan Arulanandam sss



The Concelebrated Eucharist at the Silver Jubilee

6. Family News



- By Rev. Br. Anscar Wijeratne sss



Fr. Nilindra sss baptizes his niece

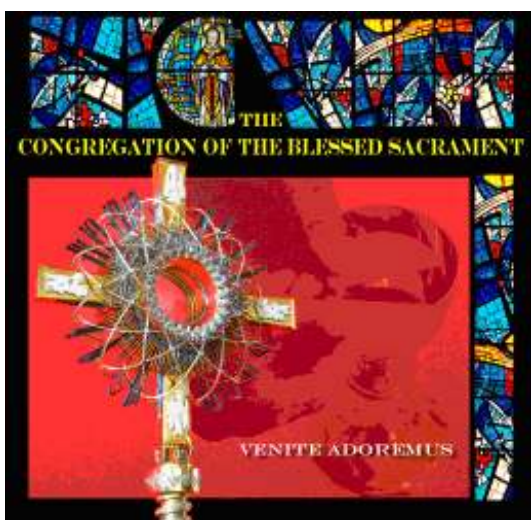
Fr. Ignatius officiates at his niece's wedding



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HERE COMES THE ARTICLES!

1. The Significance of Advent Symbols

- *By Rev. Fr. Samantha Senanayake sss*

Advent (from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming") is the period of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus.



Latin *adventus* is the translation of the Greek word *parousia*, commonly used in reference to the Second Coming. Therefore, advent serves a dual reminder of the original waiting that was done by the Hebrews for the birth of their Messiah as well as the waiting that Christians today endure as they await the second coming of Christ.

Various expressions of popular piety connected with Advent have emerged throughout the centuries. These have sustained the faith of the people, and from one generation to the next, they have conserved many valuable aspects of the liturgical season of Advent. We shall discuss three symbols: (1) the purple colour of liturgical vestments, (2) the Advent wreath, (3) the O Antiphans.

(1) The first Advent symbol is the specific colour of the liturgical vestments. A darker purple (sometimes called "Royal Purple") is used whereas in Lent the color is often a reddish purple ("Roman Purple"). The colour signifies penitence.



(2) Another symbol consists of the Advent wreath. Many churches make use of Advent wreaths during this season, with one candle representing each of the four Sundays preceding Christmas. The pink candle is lit two Sundays before Christmas. During Christmas Day, four lit white candles are used.

Placing four candles on green fronds can also be used as a symbol of Advent in Christian homes. Gathering materials for the wreath -- perhaps on an outing in the park or woods, or even in the backyard -- and assembling it at home is an interesting family project in which even the youngest children can participate. The Advent Wreath, can be a way to involve even very little children in learning about Christian preparation -- not only for celebrating Our Lord's birth, but to make our hearts truly ready to receive Him.

On the first Sunday of Advent, you may sprinkle the wreath with holy water and bless it before the first purple candle is lit. The appropriate Advent collect can be said as the candle[s] are lit each day of the week, followed by the blessing before meals, if you use the wreath at mealtime. The second Sunday two purple candles are lit; the third Sunday, two purple and one rose; and all candles are lit on the fourth Sunday.

Children who are old enough can take turns lighting the candles. (The littlest ones can blow them out at the end of the meal.) On Christmas Day, all the greens and decorations are replaced with fresh ones, and four new white candles, symbolizing Christ, replace the colored ones and are burned throughout the Christmas season. The Advent season is a good time to pray the *Angelus* at family meals.

The Advent wreath, with the progressive lighting of its four candles, Sunday after Sunday, until the Solemnity of Christmas, is a recollection of the various stages of salvation history prior to Christ's coming and a symbol of the prophetic light gradually illuminating the long night prior to the rising of the Sun of justice (cf. Mt 3:20; Lk 1:78).

(3) The "Late Advent Weekdays" or December 17-24, mark the singing of the Great Advent 'O Antiphons'. These are the antiphons for the *Magnificat* at Vespers, or Evening Prayer and mark the forthcoming birth of the Messiah. They form the basis for each verse of the popular Advent hymn, "O come, O come, Emmanuel." The O Antiphons for the *Magnificat* on the last seven days before the Vigil of the Nativity calls on the Divine Wisdom to teach us the way of prudence; on the Key of David to free us from bondage; on the Rising Sun to illuminate us sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.

From the 4th century, the season was kept as a period of fasting as strict as that of Lent. Although this fasting rule was later relaxed, the season of Advent is still considered as a season of penitence. To this day, dancing and similar festivities are forbidden, and for this reason special permission is required for marriages to be celebrated in this season.

3. Christian Origins of Familiar Christmas Customs



*By Rev, Fr. Sagara
Jayamane sss*

Most secularized Christmas observances have their roots in Christian symbol and meaning. Though the Christmas tree, Santa Claus, Christmas greeting cards, feasting and flowers have been largely commercialized, we can still enjoy them in our homes by understanding their origins and meaning.

1. Christmas Masses

Early in the Church's history, probably in the 5th century, three Masses were celebrated on Christmas Day: one at

midnight known as the "Christ Mass", one at dawn called the "Angel Mass", and one in full daylight known as the "High Mass".

The Midnight Mass was then unique to Christmas, as was the chanting of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the song of the angels. Midnight was chosen by the Church for celebration of the Christmas Mass to symbolize and, in effect, recapitulate the birth of the Savior according to the flesh, at the beginning of a new day.

The second Mass is offered to honor the birth of Jesus as the Son of God and of the Virgin Mary.

The third Mass commemorates the eternal birth of the Son from the Father. (See John N. Then, *Christmas: A Collection of Christmas lore*, Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1935, p. 93).

Christian families must make every effort to make the Mass truly "Christ-Mass". The *truest and greatest* "Christmas present" is Christ Jesus, who gives Himself to each of us uniquely at Mass, and that is where we receive the One for whom we have prepared and expected for so long.

2. The Christmas Tree



The Christmas tree is of Christian in origin. The Christmas tree goes back to the medieval German mystery plays. One of the most popular "mysteries" was the Paradise play, representing the creation of man, the sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Paradise. It usually closed with the consoling promise of the coming of the Savior with reference to His Incarnation. The Garden of Eden was indicated by a fir tree hung with apples. It represented both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Discernment of Good and Evil, which stood in the center of Paradise. (Gen 2:9)

3. Christmas Cards

The Christmas card is a Victorian creation, which began as a kind of stationery. In the late 1830s and 1840s a polite person might send out a sacred poem, delicately engraved within a framework of an embossed ornament. In 1846, the first Christmas card as we know it was produced by Sir Henry Cole, who worked for the British Postal Service, and an artist he hired named John Calcott Horsley.

4. Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas of Myra, a fourth-century bishop. In many parts of Europe, it is Saint Nicholas who traditionally appears on the eve of his feast (December 6), bearing gifts. He comes at the beginning of Advent to remind the children to prepare their hearts and lives for the coming of the Messiah.

Not much is known with certainty about the life of this bishop. He was almost certainly

imprisoned during Diocletian's persecution of Christians, and he died at Myra in Asia Minor, circa 345. He is said to have been born of wealthy parents and orphaned in his teens. A young man of exceptional virtue, he sought an opportunity to devote his inheritance to works of charity. According to legend, when he learned the plight of three young girls who were going to be given over to prostitution because their father had no money for a dowry, he anonymously gave them bags of gold, which he threw into their window at night. This legend gave rise to the association of this saint with children, and to the custom of giving presents in his name at Christmastime.



5. The Origin of the Christmas Crib

The origin of the Christmas Crib (or Manger or Nativity scene) is attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, who in 1223 celebrated the Feast of the Nativity in a new way that led to a new devotional practice. He sought to represent the birth of the Child in Bethlehem in such a way that with our bodily eyes we may see what He Suffered for lack of the necessities of a newborn babe and how He lay in a manger between the ox and ass.

Saint Bonaventure, Francis's biographer, said that many came at Francis's bidding, and sang songs and hymns with great solemnity. Mass was celebrated on the manegr, and blessed Francis preached on the Nativity of Christ our King.



2. The Gospel Message of the First Three Sundays of Advent: Some Practical Insights

- By *Rev. Fr. Nilindra Guneseķera sss*



1st Sunday – Mk. 13:33-37

The purpose of the parable of the Doorkeeper is that the disciples may take heed so that they may not fall asleep but watch. Jesus is the departing Lord. The parousia will mark his return. The doorkeeper represents the disciples, and the divisions of the night symbols for the lapse of time before the 2nd coming. The doorkeeper too, is one of the servants. Everyone has been entrusted with authority. Each has his specific task. The parable warns the community to live each moment in preparedness for the meeting with Christ.

Sleep is associated with lack of vigilance. It impedes watchfulness. The parable warns against self absorption which prevents watchfulness. The Christian cannot be careless about what he has been entrusted with. That which one is entrusted with is one's vocation in life – as a husband, or as a wife, or as a child; as a professional, or as a house wife, whatever one's state of life.

2nd Sunday – Mk. 1:1-8

John the Baptist is the sign in the wilderness that God is about to renew the covenant (cf. Hos. 2:14-23; Jer. 2:1-3). This means the believer must also enter the wilderness of renunciation. John's mission is a call to repentance. Just as all Judea and Jerusalem heeded his call, our response has to be absolute and final. For there comes one greater than John the Baptist, and the ascetical lifestyle of the Precursor points to the mightier One. Today, the gospel calls us to become signs that evoke repentance, besides sincerely answering the call to repentance. Advent being a season of penitence, we take upon ourselves ascetical practices of renunciation so that while repenting ourselves we may become signs of repentance through renunciation.

3rd Sunday – Jn. 1:6-8, 19-28

A voice that cries in the wilderness is not necessarily a voice that goes unheeded. It is a voice that speaks of God. In making a straight path for God we must first 'straighten out' our own lives!

The gospel challenges us to examine ourselves: (1) Are we men and women of God? (2) To whom have we been sent? (3) For what? (4) How do we recognize the one of whom it is said, 'there stands among you - unknown to you'?

In testifying to the light John the Baptist was also testifying to life because that life was the light of men. Testifying to the light demands the sharing in the life that is in Jesus. It demands focus on that which is above as opposed to the flesh or the world.

4th Sunday – Lk. 1:26-38

A virgin will bear a son. The virgin's name was Mary. No less than Gabriel (Dan. 9:21) announced that she was 'so highly favoured' by God. She would bear the Christ child – the Messiah, the Son of the Most High. The titles assigned to Jesus, demanded total allegiance on the part of Mary.

She was deeply disturbed, and was commanded to be unafraid. So, she wondered how this could be! She was told of the role of the Holy Spirit and given a sign in her kinswoman Elizabeth. Mary hastened to the sign, thus demonstrating her belief and signaling her willingness to respond to God's command.

Mary overcame her fears. She broke with custom of her time. She surrendered to the Spirit. She became the 'Christ – bearer.' She bore him with love. She received him with great expectation and hope. Yet, she let him walk to his destiny on the cross. She also followed him to his destiny, although at one point she along with the family had tried to 'restrain him' by seizing him (cf. Mk. 3:21).

Can we say with Mary, 'I am the servant of the Lord?' Will we let Him do what He wills with us?