



St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II

Today's Prayer

A PRAYER TO THE MOTHER OF GOD from the Byzantine Liturgy

In giving birth to Christ, O Mother of God, you remained ever a Virgin and in your Assumption you did not forsake this world. You, the Mother of Life, passed into life and by your prayers our souls are redeemed.



December 20th and 21st, 2014

The 4th Sunday of Advent

St. Thomas Church

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Reflection on the Gospel

A fundamental conviction is expressed in Christian piety by the role given to Mary the Mother of Jesus. From earliest times Mary has typified the perfected Church of the end-time. When Christians have asked themselves whether it is really possible that the redemption should be completed in the world by people themselves so unredeemed as yet, the veneration of the Immaculate Conception or total sinlessness of Mary, attributed to the foreseen merits of her Son, was a symbolic answer to that question. This doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was a way of saying that through Jesus Christ, God has brought about a new and untainted creation, his bride Mary or his bride the Church, uncontaminated by the leaven of past evil, a special and merciful divine intervention.

Similarly, when Christians asked themselves whether the heavenly goal was really attainable, the answer was expressed in the veneration of the Assumption of Mary into heaven, "body and soul," to be reunited to Christ her Son, a symbol of hope and reassurance to the whole struggling Church which she represents. This had already been foreshadowed in the Book of Revelation (11:19; 12:1ff.) in the vision of "the portent in heaven, the woman clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars and having the moon under her feet." Probably written originally about the people of Israel as the "mother" of the Messiah, this passage was soon applied both to Mary and the Church, because these both bring forth the Messiah into a world struggling with the forces of evil. Mary as the true model of faith is held up as a symbol of hope for each of us as we travel on to our own destiny.

Study of the Readings

FIRST READING: These verses from 2 Samuel summarize the Davidic covenant. Unlike the other great covenants (Noah, Abraham, and Moses), Yahweh did not speak directly to David, but made his covenant through the prophet Nathan. Thus, God not only raised up David's status, he also elevated the place of the prophet in salvation history. Prophets now revealed God's will to Israel's and Judah's royalty (whether they wanted to listen or not). This narrative turns on the phrase "house." David wanted to build YHWH a house (i.e., Temple) in which to dwell. But, through the prophet, God proposed to build David a "royal house" (i.e., a dynasty) that would forever enjoy divine favor. Notice Yahweh asserts His dominance and initiative as He speaks. He took David from the fields and made him king. He would care for him in life and give him honor after death. This was not a reward for David's loyalty but a vehicle for the divine will. Through the covenant he offered David, God revealed His intentions and His nature. He was a loving, even doting God. As Christians, we see the fulfillment of God's covenant with David in Jesus. Why? Because he was a "Son of David", not only in his lineage, but in his revelation. The mission and ministry of Jesus revealed God as that loving deity David enjoyed. But, now, we enjoy the loving initiative David enjoyed so long ago.

SECOND READING: Paul wrote his famous letter to the Roman church sometime between 55 to 58 A.D. The community had a rocky history. The clashes between the Christians and Jews caused both groups to be expelled from the capitol in 49 A.D. by Claudius (see Acts 18:2). Nero lifted the ban in 54 A.D. We can only assume the community at Rome was watched by imperial officials and was rejected by the Jewish leadership. Hence followers there felt isolated. Paul wrote his letter, in part, to defend his position that universal salvation came from the Jews. But that belief did not require Gentile converts to become Jews. Trust in God and his Christ opened the door to such salvation; simple duty to the Torah did not. We can assume Paul gave the theological logic to defend a practice already common in the churches at the time: allowing full fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile neophytes. Why should God receive glory? Because He strengthened the Roman faithful in three ways. First, He gave strength them through Paul's message (literally "good news") and his preaching. Since there is no indication Paul set foot in Rome before the letter was written, we can only assume three possibilities: Paul referred to his missionary work in the eastern provinces of the Empire. Or, Paul meant the consistent message he preached on the road. Or, he pointed to the message written in the letter itself. (Of course, he could have meant all three!) [16:25] Second, God strengthened the community by revealing His will in a way that was hidden in the past. Obviously, He meant the presence of the Messiah. [16:26a] Third, God strengthened the community by the relationship He expected everyone to have with Him, built on faith. Having trust in God automatically places the believer in a position of obedience. (I obey God. Why? Because I trust Him!) Paul pointed to the intimate relationship written in the prophets as one built on faith. Implicitly, this obedience built on faith formed the early Christian communities. [16:26b] This is the same relationship God expects of us. Why praise God? For the gifts He has given us. May we use Scripture, His grace, and our fellowship within the community as sources of strength, not as part of the Christian landscape we take for granted.

Coffee, Cookies & Conversation follow Sunday Mass in the Monastery Refectory off the Cloister Garden. **All are invited, especially our visitors.** Please contact, Fr. William Faix if you want to add announcements to the bulletin at wfaix@yahoo.com

God's promises are given to us through the Son

God decreed a time for making promises and a time for the promises to be fulfilled. The time for making promises was the time of the prophets, ending with John the Baptist, the last prophet. From then until the end is the time for the fulfilment of promises.

God is faithful. He has made himself our debtor, not by receiving anything from us but by promising us so much. The promise alone was not enough for him: he wanted it in writing, so that he could be held to it, practically entering into a contract with us that listed the promises he was making. In that way, when he began to fulfil his promises, we could see the order of their fulfilment by looking in Scripture. Therefore the time of the prophets was (as I have said so often) the time of making promises.

He promised us eternal salvation and an unending life of blessedness with the angels, and an imperishable inheritance, the joy of seeing his face, a dwelling-place with him in heaven, and the fear of death removed from us through the resurrection. This is, if you like, his ultimate promise. We look forward to it, and when we reach it, we will want nothing more. But as to how this final end is to be reached, he has also told us in promises and prophecies.

He has promised to men that they will be like God; to mortals he has promised immortality; to sinners, righteousness; to the lowly, glory.

Indeed, brethren, because what God promised seemed incredible to men that from mortality, decay, weakness, lowliness, dust and ashes they should become equals of the angels of God he did not only sign a contract with them to convince them. He sent, not just any prince, not just any angel or archangel, but his only Son. The road by which he was to lead us to the end he had promised us through his Son he would show us that road.

Even so, it was not enough for God to send his Son to point out the way he made his Son the way itself, so that we can go on our journey guided by him as he walks along his own way.

So the only Son of God was to come to men, to take on humanity, and thus to die, to ascend to heaven and sit at the right hand of the father, and so to fulfill what he had promised among the nations. After that promise to the nations had been fulfilled, he would fulfill his other promise, to come, to demand the return of what he had given, to separate the vessels of anger from the vessels of mercy, to give the wicked what he had threatened and the righteous what he had promised.

All this had to be prophesied and foretold. It had to have its coming announced. It could not come suddenly and unexpectedly, causing terror and alarm: people had to be awaiting it with faith.

The Christmas Schedule:

Christmas Eve, Dec. 24th :

18:30/6:30pm Christmas Mass

23:30/11:30pm Christmas Carols (Czech and English) followed by Midnight Mass in three languages. After Mass there will be the traditional procession to Bethlehem and the adoration of the Savior.

CHRISTMAS DAY, Dec. 25th MASS at 11am

26th December Saint Stephen's or Boxing Day.

09:30am Mass with Blessing of Grain.

European Taize Meeting in Prague

The next European Meeting will be held in the city and region of Prague, from 29 December 2014 to 2 January 2015. The Taizé Community is preparing the meeting at the invitation of the Czech Bishops' Conference and the Council of Czech Churches. It will bring together several tens of thousands of young adults for the next step of the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" initiated by Brother Roger at the end of the 1970s.

Young people from all over Europe and beyond will be hosted by the people and local church communities of the region.

At the heart of Europe, the city of a thousand towers and a thousand steeples still brings together peoples and persons from different horizons, offering warm hospitality through its cultural treasures and its spiritual heritage.

We need some families to host young people (we have 8000 young people that they have not a place to sleep during the meeting). If you want to help, please contact Fr. Antonio. antoniorivas@augustiniani.cz

Blessing

The Presidents of the Czech, English and Spanish Parish councils, the members of the various parish committees, Fr. Juan, Fr. Antonio, Fr. Jozef, Fr. Jan and Fr. William, the pastor sincerely wish you, your families, guests, visitors and our benefactors, the blessings of peace, health, joy and success as we enter into a new year of service in Malá Strana-Prague.