

## RESPECT LIFE HOLY HOUR REFLECTION FOR DECEMBER 3, 2024: Isn't Every Moment a New Advent?

This year, the week leading up to Advent was filled with many emotions. It was the last week that "regular" masses would be offered at St. William of York. What a blessing that we could return to the pre-COVID days and celebrate daily mass and the rosary at St. Will's. It was like stepping back into time, except for the fact that there were some faces missing. Some of the regular daily mass attendees had 'gone home' to the Lord. So, it was with mixed emotions that we prayed together last week.

One morning the Dominican Sisters from Mount de Sales attended mass with us. Many of them curiously looked around before taking a seat. The nun in front of me examined the stained glass windows, her mouth wide open in amazement. When her eyes fell upon the bas relief of the Holy Face of Jesus, she eagerly nudged the nuns around her and pointed it out to them. When she turned toward me and gave me the sign of peace during mass, I asked her, "Is this the first time you have been in this church?" She nodded, smiling. At the close of the last mass, as some of us prepared to say a final daily rosary, and others gathered to reminisce and say their good-byes, I thought to myself, "What a tragedy!" And then the homily of Father D'Ascanis, a former pastor at St. William of York and St. Agnes, who had said mass that Wednesday, came to mind. He had pointed out that saying good-bye to St. Will's was like having to say goodbye to the home in which we grew up. He said that leaving the family home is or would be for most of us a heart-wrenching inevitability... a moment in life's journey or many moments. He reminded us that memories of our former family home would always occupy a special place in our hearts even as our journey through life continued. He said that the same would be true of our memories of St. Will's. The truth is, in either case, our life's final destination is NOT of this world.

During the rosary, I reflected on the three events in Mary's life depicted on the domed ceiling over the altar. They reinforced Father D'Ascanis' point perfectly! Reflecting on the painting of the Annunciation, I thought of the courage and faith it took for Mary to risk death by stoning when she accepted God's will for her life, replying to the Angel Gabriel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38 RSV-CE). She didn't stop there, however!! She followed that bold act of humility and obedience with an act of sacrifice and mercy when she "went in haste into the hill country" to visit her pregnant cousin Elizabeth while she, herself, was pregnant with Jesus. Life for Mary certainly was not easy.

The birth of Jesus, depicted on Christmas cards for centuries, if not longer, was certainly no Hallmark moment for either Mary or Joseph. Joseph, on finding out that the woman to whom he was betrothed was pregnant, could have divorced Mary. But he trusted the message of an Angel and accepted Jesus as his foster son. Because of the census declared by Caesar Augustus during Mary's pregnancy, she and Joseph had to leave family and friends and travel by donkey, and possibly on foot, to Bethlehem, where they found no room at any inn, and had to settle for giving birth to the God of the universe in a stable, with cows and sheep likely in attendance. No... life for Mary, Joseph and their newborn was no picnic.

And then things went from bad to WORSE!!! The lives of baby boys two years of age and under were threatened with death. Mary and Joseph were forced to flee to Egypt to protect the life of their son... with no automobile or airplane to help them get out of town! Despite everything that life tossed at Jesus, Mary and Joseph, they responded to life's challenges with faith, trust, hope, perseverance and love... always trusting in the will of God.

Of course, we know that the challenges Mary experienced during her earthly journey didn't stop at their return from Egypt. Challenges continued all the



St. William of York - The Presentation



St. William of York - The Annunciation  
Courtesy of Maria Scott of St. William of York



St. William of York - The Nativity  
Courtesy of Maria Scott of St. William of York



St. William of York - The Coronation of Mary  
Courtesy of Maria Scott of St. William of York

way to the cross, both hers and that of her Son. Her reward while on Earth was not relief from suffering, but the peace she found in trusting in the will of God. Interestingly, however, the artist who brilliantly chronicled scenes from Mary's life, decided to depict in one of the scenes her eternal reward in the Life to Come. He painted Mary being crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit... What a conclusion to well-lived, yet difficult and challenging life!

Isn't Mary's story our story? Are the political, moral, cultural and religious issues facing us today much different from those facing Mary, Jesus, and Joseph 2000 years ago? What I find exciting this year is the realization that we are at an end of one liturgical year and at the beginning of another. We are also confronted with a new beginning in our Earthly life... a new beginning in politics... a new potential for the cause of Life... indeed, a new Advent!!! Let us be untroubled by what may lie on the horizon behind us or loom on the horizon ahead of us. Let us follow the example of Mary, Joseph and Jesus... the Creator AND Savior of the universe... Let us heed what Jesus says in the Gospel for today, December 3, 2024. "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will." Let us be childlike in trusting in God's will for our lives, not only at the beginning of a new liturgical year, but at the beginning of every day... of every hour... of every minute... until we reach the end of our journey!

**Prayer Intention:** May this Advent and Christmas season teach us how to follow the example of the Holy Family when living our lives as individuals, as members of our biological family, as members of the Body of Christ... our Church family, and as members of our human family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for us!!!

**Prayer for the Family by St. John Paul II:**

*Lord God, from You every family in Heaven and on earth takes its name.*

*Father, You are love and life. Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, the fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.*

*Grant that Your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families in the world.*

*Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.*

*Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials through which our families sometimes pass.*

*Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.*

*We ask this of You, Who is life, truth and love with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

