



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



Advent 2017

December 23rd and 24th 2017

The 4th Sunday of Advent. B

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.

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.

The Christmas Schedule 2017:

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 (in Czech).

December 31,

11:00 – Mass to thanks for the year 2017

January 1,

Mass at 11:00 am

Blessing

The Presidents of the Czech, English and Spanish Parish councils, the members of the various parish committees, Fr. Juan, Fr. Isabelo, Fr. Imman, Fr. Jozef 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.

Merry Christmas!

Reflections on the “Good Shepherd.”

In a recent retreat at St. Thomas, The Sisters of the Good Shepherd spoke about the role of Jesus as the “Good Shepherd”. In a series of “I am” statements given in John’s Gospel, they explained how Jesus reveals His identity to us - the sheep of his pasture. The concise and familiar statements prompt us to reflect on how we live our personal relationship with Jesus and how effective we are in conveying it to others:

- *I am the bread of life.* Does Jesus through His Word and Sacrament nourish me daily? Do I nourish others in my thoughts, words and actions?
- *I am the light of the world.* Does my life reflect Jesus’ teaching? Am I “light” for others in a darkened world?
- *I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life.* Is my life modeled on my way, or His Way? Do I stand up for His Way, Truth and Life in a world often opposed to His values?
- *I am the Gate for the sheep.* Have I entered into a committed relationship with Him? Do I point out the gate for others?
- *I am the Good Shepherd.* Do I trust him with my life? Do I reassure others that he can be trusted?
- *I am the Resurrection and the Life.* Do I really believe in Eternal Life? Do I share my convictions with others?
- *I am the true Vine.* Is my life deeply connected to Jesus? Is the support I receive from Him convincing enough for others to do likewise?

This Advent may be the perfect time to reflect on the depth of our own personal relationship with the Good Shepherd and to assess how well we model Jesus to all those whom God places in our path.

Giving Tree

Last Wednesday we delivered the Giving Tree gifts to 102 orphans who the community helps. Thank you for your support and generosity.