



Reflection 12

*Following Clelia's Footsteps
Toward the Heart of Jesus*

CHRISTMAS AND THE FAMILY

"May Christmas be an opportunity for all of us to rediscover the family as a cradle of life and faith, a place of acceptance and love, dialogue, forgiveness, fraternal solidarity and shared joy, a source of peace for all humanity." (Pope Francis, "Urbi et Orbi" December 25 2020)

Lk 2: 1-14 - THE BIRTH OF JESUS

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

HOW CAN CHRISTMAS BE LIVED IN THE FAMILY?

Prepare for Christmas: The season of Advent calls us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord by watchfulness, prayer, conversion, and charity. Preparing for Christmas means to go to confession, to be more committed to prayer, and to perform specific acts of charity toward those in need.

Prepare the manger: God is not born in closed or hardened hearts. God knocks but does not enter unless the door is opened from the inside. That is why Jesus' true manger is in your heart if it is a place of welcome, forgiveness, and love. "Prepare for me a manger in your family because, for me, the most beautiful manger is a family gathered in prayer, united in love, firm in faithfulness, and where each member sees my face in the other."

Honor my mother and my Father: Mary and Joseph are my family. Honor my mother, whom I gave you from the cross. Honor Joseph, who guarded me and taught me very much, even through his eloquent and prayerful silence. Remember also that the true devotion you can offer to my parents is that of honoring your parents and grandparents, especially if they are elderly.

Leave me an empty place at your table: Be generous and don't hide your fear and greed behind prejudice and false justification. Learn to see me in everyone who is hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned, and ill. Do not postpone, then, to some tomorrow that will never come the good that you can do today. Do not ever feel satisfied if you have left a brother or sister without bread.

Spend my birth with your family: Stop your frenetic life and reorder your priorities. Do not become a slave to things that perish, to work, or to anything superficial. Find the time to play with your children, to speak with your family members, and just be with them. I was born in the cold but the warmth of my family saved me from the coldness around me. Only the warmth of the family is able to warm our hearts.

Be reconciled with one another: Without forgiveness there is no Christmas. It is useless to decorate the house, the garden, and the streets with lights and Christmas trees if resentment and bitterness

rule in you. Free yourself from hatred through love, from resentment through forgiveness, from enmity through reconciliation. The one who offers forgiveness gains more than the one who receives it.

Don't be ashamed of Christmas: Don't use the name of my birth in vain, turning it into a pagan feast. Learn from John the Baptist to be a voice that cries out in the desert of the world to prepare for my arrival. Do not be afraid to say that this feast is called Christmas and is not about Santa Claus. Excluding my name is never the way to show respect to non-believers; it means that believers are ashamed. There is a lot of talk about my birth, but with no thought of me. I am speechless as I see how ingeniously my feast is taken advantage of commercially without even mentioning me. You, at least, please don't do that.

Don't give useless or inappropriate gifts: Today's materialistic and commercial culture has turned my birthday into endless gift-giving of every kind. Faced with limitless possibilities, gifts have become a burden both for those who give them and those who receive them. How many useless things fill our houses and take up space for years. Learn to give gifts well, choosing simplicity and not the brand name, usefulness rather than the right price. Free yourself from unnecessary things and share what you don't use with those who need them. "Some suggestions for Christmas gifts: To your enemy, forgiveness; to your rival, tolerance; to a friend, offer your heart; to a client, your service; to all, charity; to every child, good example; and to yourself, respect."

Remember to make holy the eve and the day of my birth: It pains me to see believers worked up and agitated preparing the Christmas Eve meal while at the same time not interested in finding time to make my arrival in the world a holy moment. I think I need to remind you: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

Remember your elders: Christmas is a time of joy but also a time for remembering. Memory is sometimes painful for those who,

after a long life, find themselves alone, abandoned, and forgotten even by their own children. Decide, then, to return to them the warmth they have given to you so abundantly when you needed it. Give them also the gift of a phone call or visit. It will be the most beautiful gift you can give me. Open your heart to the true light: the light that can illumine and transform us if it is born in us; the light of goodness that conquers evil; the light of love that overcomes hatred; the light of life that defeats death.

It is not possible to be a family without dreaming. Once a family loses the ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies. So I ask you each evening, when you make your examination of conscience, to also ask yourselves this question: Today did I dream about my children's future? Today did I dream about the love of my husband, my wife? Did I dream about my parents and grandparents who have gone before me? So it is very important to reclaim love by what we do each day. Do not ever stop being newlyweds! (Pope Francis)

Dedicate time to dialogue, to tell each other everything that in everyday family life you would not have time to do. It might be the opportunity to create new traditions for your family. Create, for example, a time for exchanging gifts or for the Christmas meal adapted to each one's needs, seeking to foster even in the simplicity of everyday life something new that could be unique to your family and to no one else.

The festive days could also be a time to share household activities: for young and old to prepare a dessert together, to watch a movie, to clean the house—these are all activities that everyone of any age can participate in and can help to enrich the wealth of family experience without having to leave home.

PRAYER

Come, Lord Jesus. Your birth in Bethlehem brought joy to the world and to every heart. Come and bring us the same joy, the same peace. Give us what we long for. Amen!

