



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2011

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Not so fast

One year during Saint Francis of Assisi's life, Christmas fell on a Friday. Knowing the holy man's love of fasting in imitation of Jesus, the brothers asked Francis if he wished them to fast even though it was Christmas. "Fast?" Francis replied. "How can we fast on the feast of the Lord's birth? Rather we should smear the walls with meat!" Obviously not a vegetarian, and perhaps prompting a little queasiness in his hearers, Francis' point was that in celebrating the God-who-becomes-flesh even the walls rejoice! Nothing is held back from the God who held nothing back from us but who embraced our whole humanity. In your joy today, in your compassion, reconciliation, forgiveness, mercy, and justice, don't hold anything back.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14 (16)*

"[God] has spoken to us through the Son . . . who is the . . . very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word."

MONDAY, DECEMBER 26 FEAST OF STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR

Let your life be your witness

What does it mean to be a martyr? Does it mean to be like Saint Stephen, willing to give your very life for what you believe? The root of *martyr* is "witness," and there are many ways we are called to testify to the gospel. These can be familiar but they are no less courageous than the path Stephen took. Being a good parent, a loving partner, honest in business dealings, compassionate—these are powerful forms of attesting to the Good News. How will you testify to the gospel with your life today? On this second day of Christmas let us pray for a spirit of courage for that witness not only in words but with our lives.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59; Matthew 10:17-22 (696)*

"For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27 FEAST OF JOHN, APOSTLE, EVANGELIST

Tell what you know

Each of us has firsthand knowledge of the presence of Christ in the world. First and foremost, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. But not only there: We've experienced Christ in the community of the church. We've encountered Christ in the grace of many sacraments and received from his tender hands the forgiveness of our sins. We've known the love of Christ in faithful marriages and felt his healing touch in times of sickness and despair. And daily, we see Christ in the eyes of the poor. On this third day of Christmas, imitate the memorable testimony of Saint John, and tell others about your own encounters with Christ.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 1:1-4; John 20:1a, 2-8 (697)*

"What we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life."

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 28

FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

Light in the darkness

King Herod's order to kill every male child in and around Bethlehem under the age of 2 is surely one of humanity's most terrible moments. It's a dark story for a dark time of year. Yet darkness, whether it belongs to the whole of humanity or resides in our own soul, has much to teach those who desire to deepen and grow spiritually. As the poet Pablo Neruda advises, "We need to

sit on the rim / of the well of darkness / and fish for fallen light / with patience." On this fourth day of Christmas, let us pray for the gift of compassion and courage to explore our shadow-side so that its influence on our actions might be diminished and our inner light can shine more brightly.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 1:5-2:2; Matthew 2:13-18 (698)*

"God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29

FEAST OF THOMAS BECKET, BISHOP, MARTYR

Let's collect our prayers

In Catholic liturgy, a *col-lect* (stress on the first syllable) is a liturgical act that calls us to pray together in dialogue with the presider, as in the opening prayer of the Mass. From the website *CatholicCulture.org*, here is a collect we can pray together today, the fifth day of the Octave of Christmas, as we bring to mind Saint Thomas Becket, who died in defense of his faith: "O God, who gave the martyr Saint Thomas Becket the courage to give up his life for the sake of justice, grant, through his intercession, that, renouncing our life for the sake of Christ in this world, we may find it in heaven."

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:3-11; Luke 2:22-35 (202)*

"My own eyes have seen the salvation which you prepared in the sight of every people, a light to reveal you to the nations."

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

Share the wealth of family

For some of us, this late in the holiday season, the burden of family may just be starting to express itself. (Will this household of relatives ever leave?) Yet many also find themselves away from their homes or families for reasons not entirely under their control, ranging from military service, education, employment, illness, divorce, loss, or estrangement. For them even a slightly used and tarnished family would be better than none at all. On this sixth day of Christmas, share your heart and home by inviting someone in to enjoy the gift of belonging.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3 or Hebrew 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40 (17)*

"I will make your reward very great."

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31

SEVENTH DAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

The best gift ever!

Today, the close of the calendar year and the seventh and next-to-last day of the Christmas season, there is much to be grateful for. Perhaps the greatest source of thanksgiving is for the very gift of God's Son, whose coming into the world we are in the midst of celebrating. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, "God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will": Through Christ, the Word made flesh, and in the Holy Spirit, humanity would have access to the father and share in divine nature. Wow! God wants us to be divine, to share in God's very nature. Now that is a gift worth keeping and learning how to use.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:18-21; John 1:1-18 (204)*

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

©2011 by TrueQuest Communications, L.L.C. PHONE: 800-942-2811;
E-MAIL: mail@takefiveforfaith.com; WEBSITE: www.TakeFiveForFaith.com.
Licensed for noncommercial use. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotes come from the New American Bible.

Contributors: Alice Camille, Daniel Grippo, Father Larry Janowski, O.F.M., Ann O'Connor, Joel Schorn, Patrice J. Tuohy, Sister Julie Vieira, I.H.M.