

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) — Mass during the Day

Fr. Samuel Springuel

25 December, 2024

1st Reading Isaiah 52:7–10

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 98:1,2–3,3–4,5–6

2nd Reading Hebrews 1:1–6

Gospel John 1:1–18

“All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.” It’s a beautiful sentiment, but one I’m not sure was entirely true when the psalmist wrote it. After all, he was writing about a thousand years before Jesus’s birth, a time when the Kingdom of Israel, while likely still high off its successful unification and conquests under King David, was still little more than a small state that happened to sit on a major trade route between much larger ones. Indeed, it is due to that positioning that the land would subsequently be fought over and conquered by various entities including Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. The psalm, then, is aspirational; it proclaims what should be the case rather than what is. It thus fits in very well with the Great Commission of Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus instructs the Apostles to go forth and make disciples of all nations.

That, however, is only the literal meaning of the psalm, and not where I want to go on this day when we celebrate Christ’s birth. Instead, I’m going to take my cue from Mother Natalia of the “What God Is Not” podcast, who in turn took her cue from Maximus the Confessor. One of the things that Maximus taught is that each individual sums up the whole of creation and so when the psalmist talks about “all the ends of the earth” we can see in this phrase a parallel for “all the parts of ourselves.” When the psalmist admonishes “all you lands” to sing praise joyfully, we can discover a prescription for ourselves, and how each part of us, every aspect of our lives, should be so constructed as to give praise to God.

Our minds should praise God in the way we think. Do we attempt to discern the will of God when making decisions? Do we allow our attention to be directed by mindless algorithms, or do we cultivate a focus on God?

Our bodies should praise God in the way we live, work, and play. Do we use our hands to reach out to others and show them the love of God? Are we mindful of our part in act of creation in the way we do chores and other forms of work? Do we treat ourselves as the beloved children of God we are with the way we exercise, eat, and recreate?

Our hearts should praise God in the way we relate to one another, and God. Do we recognize the value in other people and demonstrate an appreciation for

it? Do we prioritize people over rules? Do we set time aside for others, and God, in order to cultivate and deepen our relationship with them?

All parts of ourselves, body, mind, spirit, are meant to give praise to God at all times. To do so is to live a life without half-measures, one fully committed to God. It is not enough to go to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation. To partake of Confession, Eucharist, and the other sacraments only to set them aside when it's time to do the "real work" of living in the world.

That's not to say that this is easy; it's not. It's not to say it's normal; our secular world works hard to make it seem strange. It's not even to say it's common; the relative paucity of saints when compared to the whole human race shows just how uncommon it is to live out the praise of God in all parts of our lives. But still, that should be our goal, something that we continually strive for, no matter how far short of the mark we may fall at any given moment.

So allow me to make a suggestion. As you welcome the Christ child into your home and heart today, ask him for help. Ask him to show you just one part of your life where you need to let God in and help you turn it into something that sings joyful praise to God. We may still be 8 days away from New Year's Day, but make this your resolution for the new year. It's never too early to start on something so important.