

LOVE IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God – 1 January 2023



Happy New Year to all. It is the *Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*.

GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Gospel of Luke 2:16-21 today tells us:

*“So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph,
and the child lying in the manger.
When they saw this, they made known
what had been told them about this child;
and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.
But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.
The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God
for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child;
and he was called Jesus,
the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”*

As we follow the example of Mary as she pondered these words in her heart, what we treasure and ponder, tells us much about ourselves.

THREE QUESTIONS: WHAT DO WE TREASURE & PONDER?

1. How do we treasure God’s love and our experiences of God’s love? (pause and reflect)
2. How do we treasure the Word of God in our lives? (pause and reflect)
3. How do we ponder the working of God in our lives? (pause and reflect)

POPE FRANCIS: TWO HELPFUL REFLECTIONS

As New Year Gifts, Pope Francis offers us two very helpful reflections.

1. 2023 PEACE MESSAGE FROM POPE FRANCIS

Since the late 1960s, an annual Peace Message from the Pope has been shared with the world.

As we begin this New Year, Pope Francis encourages us as he says:

“When tragic events seem to overwhelm our lives, and we feel plunged

into a dark and difficult maelstrom of injustice and suffering, we are likewise called to keep our hearts open to hope and to trust in God, who makes himself present, accompanies us with tenderness, sustains us in our weariness and, above all, guides our path. For this reason, Saint Paul constantly exhorts the community to be vigilant, seeking goodness, justice and truth: “So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (5:6). His words are an invitation to remain alert and not to withdraw into fear, sorrow or resignation, or to yield to distraction or discouragement. Instead, we should be like sentinels keeping watch and ready to glimpse the first light of dawn, even at the darkest hour.”

He lists some of the interconnected challenges that we need to confront in 2023. We do this, inspired by God’s love.

“we cannot ignore one fundamental fact, namely that the many moral, social, political and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected, and what we see as isolated problems are actually causes and effects of one another. Consequently, we are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion. We must revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all. We must promote actions that enhance peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars that continue to spawn poverty and death. We urgently need to join in caring for our common home and in implementing clear and effective measures to combat climate change. We need to battle the virus of inequality and to ensure food and dignified labour for all, supporting those who lack even a minimum wage and find themselves in great difficulty. The scandal of entire peoples starving remains an open wound. We also need to develop suitable policies for welcoming and integrating migrants and those whom our societies discard. Only by responding generously to these situations, with an altruism inspired by God’s infinite and merciful love, will we be able to build a new world and contribute to the extension of his kingdom, which is a kingdom of love, justice and peace.”

Full text of message: https://bit.ly/FrancisWorldDayofPeace_2023

All Pope Francis World Day of Peace messages: <https://bit.ly/AllFrancisWorldDayofPeace>

2. APOSTOLIC LETTER ABOUT ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

When we think of St Francis, we might only think of St. Francis of Assisi. Yet St Francis de Sales lived and wrote in depth about God’s divine love.

In these changing times of serious challenges and new opportunities, Pope Francis offers us an Apostolic Letter about St. Francis de Sales. It is titled *TOTUM AMORIS EST*, which translates as *“EVERYTHING PERTAINS TO LOVE”*.

He compares our time with the time of St. Francis de Sales.

*“On this anniversary of the fourth centenary of his death,
I have given much thought to the legacy of Saint Francis de Sales for our time.
I find that his flexibility and his far-sighted vision have much to say to us.
Partly by God’s gift and partly thanks to his own character,
but also by his steady cultivation of lived experience,
Francis perceived clearly that the times were changing.
On his own, he might never have imagined that those changes
represented so great an opportunity for the preaching of the Gospel.
The word of God that he had loved from his youth now opened up before him
new and unexpected horizons in a rapidly changing world.*

*That same task awaits us in this, our own age of epochal change.
We are challenged to be a Church that is outward-looking
and free of all worldliness, even as we live in this world,
share people’s lives and journey with them in attentive listening and acceptance.
That is what Francis de Sales did when he discerned
the events of his times with the help of God’s grace.
Today he bids us set aside undue concern for ourselves,
for our structures and for what society thinks about us,
and consider instead the real spiritual needs and expectations of our people.
In our own time too, it is helpful to revisit some of the crucial decisions he made,
so that we for our part can respond to today’s changes with the wisdom born of the Gospel.”*

Pope Francis explains the cords of God, and quotes St Francis de Sales.
He speaks of God’s invitation, enticements and holy inspirations.

*“The first of those decisions was to reinterpret and propose anew
to each man and woman, in his or her specific condition,
the beauty of our relationship with God.
The ultimate reason and practical purpose of his Treatise
was to illustrate to his contemporaries the attractiveness of the love of God.
“What”, he asks, “are the ‘cords’ that God’s providence uses to draw our hearts to his
love?”
Echoing the words of the prophet Hosea (11:4), he defines those ordinary means
as “cords of humanity, charity and friendship”.
“Clearly”, he writes, “we are not drawn to God by chains of iron, like bulls or oxen,
but by invitations, enticements and holy inspirations;
these are the cords of Adam and of human kindness,
rightly befitting the human heart, which is naturally free”.
“By those same cords, God brought his people forth from slavery,
taught them to walk and held them by the hand, like fathers and mothers with their children.
His was not the way of external imposition, despotic and arbitrary power, or violence,
but that of a persuasiveness that respects our human freedom.
“The power of grace” – Francis continues, surely thinking of the many life stories
he had encountered – “does not constrain the heart, but attracts it...
Grace acts strongly, yet in such a pleasing way
that our will is not overwhelmed by so powerful a force;*

while pressing us, it does not oppress our liberty.”

As we enter this New Year, God’s love radically precedes us.

“... In our relationship with God we always experience a gratuitousness that testifies to the depth of the Father’s love for us.

At the same time, this grace never makes us passive.

It leads us to realize that God’s love radically precedes us,

and that his first gift consists precisely in our acceptance of that love.

Each person therefore is responsible for cooperating with his or her own fulfilment, with spreading his or her wings with confident trust before the gust of God’s wind.”

Pope Francis explains what true devotion is, and quotes St Francis de Sales on devotion.

“The origin of true devotion is to be found elsewhere;

its deepest roots are in God’s life dwelling within our hearts.

“True and lively devotion presupposes the love of God;

indeed, it is none other than a genuine, and not generic, love of God”

In Francis’ lively language, devotion is

“a sort of spiritual alertness and energy whereby charity acts within us or, we act by means of it, with promptness and affection”.

For this reason, devotion does not exist alongside charity,

but is one of its manifestations, while at the same time leading back to it.

Devotion is like a flame with regard to fire:

it increases the intensity of charity without altering its quality...

it becomes a style of life, a way of living immersed in our concrete daily existence.

It embraces and discovers meaning in the little things:

food and dress, work and relaxation, love and parenthood,

conscientiousness in the fulfilment of our duties.

In a word, it sheds light on the vocation of each individual.”

The joy of our faith is described by St. Francis de Sales as the ecstasy of work and life.

“Saint Francis thus came to view the entirety of the Christian life as “the ecstasy of work and life”.

For him, Christianity was not to be confused with a facile escapism or self-absorption, much less a dull and dreary obedience.

We know that this danger can always be present in the life of faith.

Indeed, there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter,

and while we can understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith begin

to revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress.

Allowing joy to blossom in our hearts is what Francis de Sales means by “the ecstasy of work and life”. “

Full text of Apostolic Letter: https://bit.ly/Francis_StFrancisdeSales_28122022

TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

In our own church, we gaze at the Christmas Crib.
The Magi, the Three Wise Ones haven't arrived yet.
We see that they are still journeying.
With the stress and rush of modern life,
we might be tempted to forget to keep the Twelve Days of Christmas.
We might wonder why every day is not like Christmas.

THE CODE FOR SINGING TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

With the spirit of ecstasy and life, let us sing together as a community,
the song "*Twelve Days of Christmas*".
Sung a long time ago in a time of oppression,
the song has its own code for helping children to learn about their faith.

- Jesus (*the partridge in a pear tree*)
- Old and New Testaments in the Bible (*2 turtle doves*)
- Faith, Hope and Love (*3 French hens*)
- Four Gospels (*the 4 calling birds*)
- First Five Books of the Bible (*5 golden rings*)

- Six Days of Creation (*6 geese a-laying*)
- Seven Sacraments (*7 swans a-swimming*)
- Eight Beatitudes (*8 maids a-milking*)
- Nine Fruit of the Holy Spirit (*9 ladies dancing*)
- The Ten Commandments (*10 lords a-leaping*)
- Eleven Faithful Apostles (*11 pipers piping*)
- The twelve teachings of the Apostles Creed (*12 drummers drumming*)

As we enter this New Year, God's love radically precedes us.
We are not alone.

Happy New Year. Let us sing together.

Father Gerry

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/010123.cfm>

Please see the following page for Father Gerry's Happy New Year Message.

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL

This weekend we celebrate
the Solemnity of Mary,
Mother of God.

We pray for each of our families.

At Masses we sing the 12 Days of
Christmas in two parts.

These Dancing Lady Orchids
reminds me of the 9th Day of
Christmas in the song.

We place them beside
our Christmas Crib.

May you have a blessed New Year.

A time to treasure
the gifts of God in our lives.

Father Gerry

www.stjosephsbrackenridge.com

Dancing Ladies Orchid in Father Gerry's Garden – orchid gifted by Catherine Hefferan

