

“AN ORDINARY CHRISTMAS”
SUNDAY CHRISTMAS 1 B - HOLY FAMILY
FOR DECEMBER 27, 2020 – ST PATRICK CATHOLIC CHURCH

You know, we celebrated Christmas
just a couple of days ago.
But, for us Catholics, the Christmas season
is just beginning.

That’s why today’s gospel story picks up
where the gospel passage
on Christmas day left off:

Today the Christmas story continues
and the baby Jesus is now forty days old.
We find him in the arms of Mary
as she and Joseph set off to the Temple in Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord
according to the Jewish law they honored and loved.

As the Christmas story continues,
you’ll notice the message goes deeper.

So, today we have another beautiful example
of the fact that
the heart of our Catholic tradition
is the sanctification of *the ordinary*.

Unlike other religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam,
Where God is **transcendent**, somewhere – out there.

In Christianity, the Word of God *becomes flesh*,
becomes **immanent, reachable, touchable**.

So, in the readings of the Christmas season,

we find that it's **ordinary** people,
a carpenter and his wife,
and rough and sturdy shepherds
...not just angels and kings
who play important parts in our story.

And in Luke's gospel this story continues
with an old man, Simeon,
and an old prophetess, Anna,
who are still looking for the Messiah
at the end of their lives when you would think
that there is not a lot to look forward to.

All these folks, you see, are **ordinary** people,
just like you and me.

But when God draws near,
suddenly **ordinary** events turn into miracles.

An ordinary guy, Joseph,
a husband and small-town carpenter,
summons extraordinary courage to "do the right thing,"
which is just another way of saying, "doing the will of God."

As the Christmas story continues to unfold for us today,
we again find the **ordinary** at the very center of the plot.

Today it's Anna and Simeon, two old folks
who become **extraordinary** messengers.

So, you see, Christmas isn't just a day,
it's a season all by itself.
And today's Feast of the Holy Family
is a beautiful part of this season of Christmas.

The Feast of the Holy Family reminds us
that we encounter God not only at church,
but also within our relationships—
within our friends,
within our families...

Yes, within our human flesh we come to know
the tender embrace of the eternal God.

One of the Church's great mystics - St. Teresa of Avila,
expressed it very well.

When pilgrims would ask how they,
like her, could achieve the heights
of meditation and contemplation,
her first question to them would be:
“How are your relationships with others?
How are you getting along with the people in your life?”

And it's not by detaching ourselves from the world
and the people around us,
but rather
it is through

the humility, the forgiveness,
the kindness, the comfort,
the challenges, the patience
that we give *one another*
that we are transformed
and our **world** is made holy.

It's as ordinary as the bread and butter on your kitchen table:

When a father entrusts the keys of the car to his son or daughter who has
just received their driver's license.
(Talk about faith!)

When a little girl gives her mother a dandelion
from the back yard.
(Talk about grace!)

When a mother stands by her teenager
who doesn't seem very kind or appreciative.
(Talk about forbearance!)

When a spouse forgives the wound of infidelity.
(Talk about loving the sinner but hating the sin!)

The list goes on:

When during a pandemic we love one another enough
to make sacrifices so that all are protected
from a virus that causes
our loved ones to suffer, some to the point of death.

When a husband cares for a wife
suffering from MS for twenty years
and eventually departs from the world.
He himself develops dementia and is cared for
by a daughter he once had to
forgive for stealing money
from him for drugs
at a dark time in her life.

It's amazing, what God can do.
It's amazing, this story of salvation that begins at Christmas
and forms the backdrop of our entire lives.

But it's here, the Grace we need, the love we seek.
It's all here.
In our homes.

In our places of work.

It's here in this world...in the lives of strangers,
in the lives of our families,
in the lives of our friends
that the **ordinary** is made holy...

And it starts here, right here – at St. Patrick.
(...and for those watching this streamed Mass
it starts right there where you live also.)

Where words speak of God
and songs sing of hope...

where ordinary bread becomes Eucharist – Holy Communion,
and families...**ordinary** families,
“step up to the plate”
to receive the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world.
It's those **ordinary** families, our families, who then take on the job
of angels and saints.

- based on a homily by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer, from 2008