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CHRISTMAS

MIDNIGHT MASS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, December 25th, 2025)

Venerunt festinantes.
They came with haste.
(Lk 2:16)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

A FEW STEPS were sufficient to take the earthenware statue of the Child Jesus, while the organ was playing Christmas carols and after the chant of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham, a few steps were sufficient to take this statue from a credenza in the sanctuary to the crib at the back of the church, where it will remain until the feast of the Presentation in the Temple, next February 2nd. A few steps for an infinite path!

At the beginning of this holy night, the Child Jesus was lying on a small table at the foot of the pillar bearing the statue of Our Lady of Wisdom. Was it due to the stroke of genius of a sacristan probably enlightened by the Holy Spirit? It could be. The altar had initially been recommended as a significant place, but the preference granted to this pillar is not totally inconsequential. Before He was born, didn't Christ spend nine months in the maternal womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary?

Medieval statuary, as both the statues of Our Lady of a Good Death and Our Lady of Wisdom in our abbey church

bear witness to it, was fond of representing Our Lady sitting in majesty on a throne, and herself offering a throne to the Child Jesus sitting on her knees. Mary deserves the title of *Sedes Sapientiae*, Throne of Wisdom, conferred on her by her litanies.

But the liturgy doesn't hesitate to go a step further, as it applies to Our Lady texts that concern the Divine Wisdom:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before He made any thing from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old, before the earth was made. [...] I was with Him forming all things: and was delighted every day, playing before Him at all times, playing in the world: and my delights were to be with the children of men.^a

a. *Prov* 8:22-23, 30-31.

From all eternity, God willed the Virgin whom we contemplate in the crib, shaping her as a mother worthy of His Son. The angel Gabriel addressed her as the "full of grace." The perfection of her spiritual beauty, complemented with beauty of the body, required the attribute of wisdom. The Holy Spirit came upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her.

Therefore, it is from the womb of Mary, Mother of the grace which is Christ Himself, that the Divine Child comes to us.

However, the epistle to Titus invites us to take another step. In the child of the crib, "the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men."^b The origin of such an unlikely journey can but be the bosom of the Father, as confirmed by these verses taken from the Book of Wisdom:

b. *Tit* 2:11.

For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty Word leaped down from heaven from Thy royal throne, as a fierce conqueror into the midst of the land of destruction.^c

c. *Wis* 18:14-15.

And the epistle to the Hebrews will pursue:

Wherefore, when Christ came into the world, He said, "Sacrifices and offerings Thou hast not desired, but a body Thou hast prepared for me. Burnt offerings and sin offerings did

not please Thee. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Thy will, O God,’ as it is written of Me in the roll of the book.”^d

d. Hb 10:5-7.

Let us now consider the Child in the crib. We have desired His coming. We have also received a promise:

Behold, the Lord will come on the clouds of heaven in all His might. [...] Behold, He comes to give light to the eyes of His servants.^e

*e. Antiphons for Lauds,
2nd Sunday in Advent.*

We were expecting a mighty God, and behold, a frail child is born unto us!

God is faithful. What is therefore the might that lies within the Child of Bethlehem?

Not He to subjugate kingdoms
By blood, violence, or fear.
Raised on His high gibbet,
He draws all things to Himself through love.^f

*f. Hymn of Lauds,
Feast of Christ the King.*

The stable in Bethlehem, a weak glimmer in the night, is a powerful sun towards which beggars of love are going to take their way. The first of them will be shepherds, watchmen who spend their night in the fields. Angels have brought them the good news:

Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.^g

g. Lk 2:10-12.

These poor have just a few steps to take to answer the angel’s invitation. Will they dare forsake their fold, their rest? Doors have already been closed in the face of the Divine Child and His parents. But the shepherds don’t hesitate. They don’t calculate. God is coming from so far away. Full of trust, the shepherds won’t be disappointed.

St. Luke pursues:

They found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child.^h

h. vv. 16-17.

What is there in this crib that is so extraordinary? And yet, once they have finished their visit, the shepherds become the first apostles. They continue the mission of the angel, and go and sow in their contemporaries' hearts the desire to go to the crib to meet there the Divine Child and His Mother. The fire the Lord has come to cast on the earth then begins to spread.

Mgr José Maria Escriva used to say: "A saint is a sinner who keeps trying."

During this holy night, the angel Gabriel addresses each of us, whoever we may be. He invites us to set off on the path leading to the crib. Should our hearts have got slightly cold or tired, he invites us to keep trying. What is more, he invites us to bring something of the Christmas mystery to so many empty and cold cribs, with barely something to fill them, namely, our contemporaries' hearts, and sometimes the hearts of those near us. He who truly encounters the Lord cannot escape unscathed.

The dawn of a new day has risen. The Lord is coming. Poor as the shepherds, beggars for divine love, let us remain sons and daughters of hope. Let us make haste to go to the crib. God is awaiting us.

Have a holy night and a holy Christmas. Amen.

