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The Holy Father's Prayer Intentions For This Month

General Intention:

That our personal experience of suffering may be an occasion for better understanding the situation of unease and pain which is the lot of many people who are alone, sick or aged, and stir us all to give them generous help.

Mission Intention:

That the peoples of the earth may open their doors to Christ and to His Gospel of peace, brotherhood and justice.

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Disciple

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Breaking Open the Word—Notes on the Sunday Gospels

Dec. 5 (Mt. 3:1-12)

In today's Gospel John the Baptist speaks of the "Kingdom of Heaven," which one biblical scholar calls "the overarching theme of Matthew's Gospel." This phrase appears 32 times in his Gospel and carries the same meaning as the phrase "Kingdom of God" (e.g. 19:23-24). Specifying that this kingdom is "of heaven" was meant to distinguish the kingdom proclaimed by John (3:2) and Jesus (4:17) from the earthly kingdom many of the Israelites of their day were longing for. The presence of this heavenly kingdom is mediated in history through the Church (16:18-19), but it will not be fully present until the Second Coming of Christ (25:31-46).

Dec. 12 (Mt. 11:2-11)

In today's Gospel we see that John the Baptist's ministry re-

calls Malachi 3:1. "Malachi's prophecies associate the Lord's forerunner with Elijah, the great prophet of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:5). Jesus views John as this prophet, who preaches repentance to Israel in the 'spirit' of Elijah (Lk. 1:17) and offers God's faithful remnant a final opportunity for salvation (11:15). Even John's clothing recalls Elijah's distinctive dress."

Dec. 19 (Mt. 1:18-24)

In today's Gospel we hear that Mary was "betrothed" to Joseph when Jesus was conceived within her womb by the Holy Spirit. In ancient Judaism betrothal was very different from our modern notions of someone being "engaged." Betrothal was a temporary period of time (sometimes as long as a year) between the couple marrying and then living together as husband and wife. Since betrothed

couples were legally married, even though they did not live together yet, their relationship could only come to an end via death or divorce (Deut. 24:1-4).

Dec. 26 (Mt. 2:13-15, 19-23)

In today's Gospel we hear the account of the Holy Family's flight out of Egypt. The prophet referenced by St. Matthew as having proclaimed "Out of Egypt have I called my son" is Hosea. In Hosea 11:1 God, through the prophet, "points back to the Exodus, where God's 'first-born son' (Ex. 4:22), Israel, was delivered from slavery under the oppressive Pharaoh. Matthew sees this text also pointing forward, when Jesus, the eternal first-born Son (Rom 8:29), is delivered from the tyrant Herod and later brought out of Egypt (2:21).

Faith Foundations—Basics of Catholic Christian Belief

Virtue

(From the Compendium of the
Catechism of the Catholic Church)

What is a virtue?

A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. "The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God" (Saint Gregory of Nyssa). There are human virtues and theological virtues.

What are the human virtues?

The human virtues are habitual and stable perfections of the intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions and guide our conduct accord-

ing to reason and faith. They are acquired and strengthened by the repetition of morally good acts and they are purified and elevated by divine grace.

What are the principal human virtues?

The principal human virtues are called the *cardinal* virtues, under which all the other virtues are grouped and which are the hinges of a virtuous life. The cardinal virtues are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

What is prudence?

Prudence disposes reason to

discern in every circumstance our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it. Prudence guides the other virtues by pointing out their rule and measure.

What is justice?

Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give to others their due. Justice toward God is called "the virtue of religion."

What is fortitude?

Fortitude assures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It reaches

(continued on next page)

Faith Foundations...Continued

even to the ability of possibly sacrificing one's own life for a just cause.

What is temperance?

Temperance moderates the attraction of pleasures, assures the mastery of the will over instincts and provides balance in the use of created goods.

What are the theological virtues?

The theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity.

What is the virtue of faith?

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and all

that he has revealed to us and that the Church proposes for our belief because God is Truth itself. By faith the human person freely commits himself to God. Therefore, the believer seeks to know and do the will of God because "faith works through charity" (*Galatians 5:6*).

What is hope?

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire and await from God eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying on the help of the grace of the

Holy Spirit to merit it and to persevere to the end of our earthly life.

What is charity?

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. Jesus makes charity the new commandment, the fullness of the law. "It is the bond of perfection" (*Colossians 3:14*) and the foundation of the other virtues to which it gives life, inspiration, and order.



"Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God."

Faith and Media—Reading and Viewing Recommendations

Book of the Month:

***The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis**

This book is a classic. Composed of a series of letters from Screwtape (a senior demonic tempter in Hell) to his young and inexperienced nephew Wormwood, this book offers some rather profound insights into the Christian life and how it should be lived. Wormwood is assigned the task of tempting a certain man in Britain and his uncle offers him advice, as well as criticism (we only have access to Screwtape's letters).

The reverse psychology of the demons casts authentic Christian living into stark relief. If you are like me, you will find that the book challenges you to examine whether or not your own "tempter" has successfully used these tricks on you.

[*This book is available at most new and used book retailers and local libraries*].

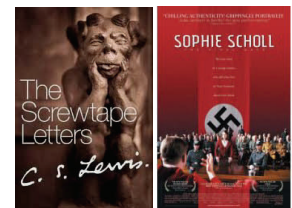
Film of the Month:

Sophie Scholl—The Final Days

An award winning dramatic

account of the German student Nazi-resistance group "The White Rose." Based on actual historical documents, the film chronicles one of the students' (Scholl) arrest, interrogation, and trial. The film does a good job of highlighting the Christian faith of Scholl and how it helped her through her ordeal. Should be especially inspiring for young adults.

[Available at rental stores and your local county library system.]



Left: *The Screwtape Letters* (Harper Collins)

Right: *Sophie Scholl—The Final Days* (Zeitgeist Films)

Catholic Calendar—Upcoming Opportunities for Adult Faith Formation

Advent Day of Reflection

For those of you looking for some spiritual nourishment during the Advent season, please consider the following day of reflection. Fr. Paul McDonnell, OSJ will be presenting "***In Praise of the Messiah: The Advent "O Antiphons"***" on **December 11** at the **St. Joseph Oblate Seminary in Pittston**.

The "O Antiphons" are seven short prayers that are tradi-

tionally associated with the Advent season. These ancient, but ever new petitions, beautifully express the Church's profound yearning for the long-awaited Christ Child. In prayerful reflection, Father McDonnell will lead the group in the understanding of how these Old Testament prophecies fulfill the promise of salvation, and how they are intertwined with our own personal longing for Christ, Redeemer and Savior.

The day will run from 9:30-2:30 and the snow date is December 18. The cost for the day is \$30, which includes lunch.

To register, please call (570) 207-2213, ext. 1107. This would be a great program to invite adults in your parish to, as Fr. McDonnell is a very engaging speaker.

"Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you..."

~1 Pt. 3:15