



Christmas

December 24-25, 2017



Readings

This week:

Isaiah 62:1-5

Acts of the Apostles 13:16-17, 22-25

Matthew 1:1-25

Next week:

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

Colossians 3:12-21

Luke 2:22-40

Psalm

Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord. (*Psalm 89*)

Today

Today's presider is Fr. Kevin Ballard.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. Members of the Thomas Merton community plan these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to "full, active and conscious participation" in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate by check or cash, every Sunday there is a donation basket in the back of church or by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope in the bulletin the last Sunday of every month to mail your donation. Please do not put your TMC donation in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).

Calendar

From
Thomas
Merton



*It is good that somewhere in the world
there are those who realize
that Christ is born.*

*There were only a few shepherds
at the first Bethlehem,
and it is the same now.*

*The ox and the ass understood more
of the first Christmas than
the high priests in Jerusalem.
And it is the same way today.*

—The Seven Storey Mountain

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy; to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality; and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

TMC membership:

The Thomas Merton Center was founded in 1995 by Roman Catholic lay persons to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support, and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, and through him, with God. We are a nonprofit religious education organization based on a membership model, which allows TMC the opportunity to sponsor the regular 8:45 a.m. Sunday Mass in this church and other liturgies, as well as spiritual education programs, social justice initiatives, and fellowship activities that help build community. As an intentional faith community, inspired by the spirit and documents of Vatican II, we invite membership application from all interested persons; a brochure and application forms are available in the church vestibule. For more information about TMC membership, contact Kay Williams, (650) 679-9015, kaywill@pacbell.net.



Thomas Merton: A Prophet for Our Times:

Saturday/Sunday, January 13-14, 2018, Br. Don Bisson, FMS, will be leading a conference on *Thomas Merton: A Prophet for Our Times* at Mercy Center in Burlingame. Bisson, a Marist brother based in New York, has graduate degrees in liturgy, spirituality, and transpersonal psychology, and a D.Min. from the Pacific School of Religion in the area of Spiritual Direction and Jungian Psychology, and he is widely respected as a commentator and workshop leader on the interrelationship of spirituality and psychology. He will study Thomas Merton's writings, messages, and prophetic vision for our times. You can register at www.mercy-center.org or by calling (650) 340-7474. Registration deadline is January 6, 2018. Cost is \$195 for overnight guests or \$120 for commuters. Bisson is also leading two other retreats at Mercy Center: *Men's Issues in Spiritual Direction*, on Saturday, January 6, and *Dreamworks as Spiritual Practice* on Sunday, January 7.

Your first Christmas present:

This Christmas Mass comes to you as a gift from about forty members of the regular 8:45 Mass community. To bring you this celebration today took not only the presider but also four greeters, three sacristans (to set up the altar environment), one bread baker, two ushers, two collection monitors, two lectors, seven Eucharistic ministers, two environment ministers (for the candlesticks and flowers), the musicians, two bulletin ministers, and six members of the liturgy team who planned it all. Not to mention the many others who contribute to this bulletin and members of the parish staff who cleaned and helped us decorate the church. We who did the work believe this is what Church is about, and we would be overjoyed to have you join us in 2018!



Envelopes:

A Thomas Merton Center envelope is included in the bulletin the last Sunday of each month. Your donation makes possible our monthly contribution to St. Elizabeth Seton School; our spiritual education programs, weekly bulletin, and other publications; and hospitality after Mass and at other meetings. We need your support—please be generous!



St. Elizabeth Seton school taking applications:

Ms. Evelyn Rosa, Principal of St. Elizabeth Seton School, writes that applications for new students for 2018-2019 are now available in the school office and on their website (setonpaloalto.org) for all grades including the Little Saints Preschool. Preschool applicants must be 4 years old by September 1, 2018. Kindergarten applicants must be 5 years old by September 1, 2018.

There will be an Informational Meeting/Open House for parents of Pre-K and Kindergarten applicants on Wednesday, January 24, at 7:00 pm in the school auditorium. An Open House and Science Fair will take place on Wednesday, January 31, 7:00-8:30 pm. Interested applicants are welcome to join faculty and friends at this annual Open House for the school families. If you have friends or family members who are interested in sending their children to Seton, please have them call the school and pick up an application in the school office or on the website (address above).

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

Christmas day, by Joan Chittister, OSB:

There is a certain amount of misunderstanding about Christmas. It is not the birth of Jesus. It only commemorates the birth of Jesus. Christmas is really meant to mark our own new beginning of spirit and life and understanding and commitment. It is our own rebirth that Christmas seeks to celebrate.

Christmas is only the culmination of an Advent that sets us on a road to new life, new insight, new awareness, and new energy of heart. This Advent calls us to hope that whatever we need to continue the excavation of soul that we've begun will end in a new awareness of Jesus with us always.



This Advent invites us to move away from a neurotic and unattainable perfectionism that can only depress our spirits to the kind of sorrow of heart that leads us to begin over and over and over again to confront the effects of sin in the world with hearts high and souls ready.

This Advent guides us to develop the internal contentment it takes to reshape a grasping and hectic world around us with quiet certitude rather than to accept it with unthinking or even sinful complacency.

This Advent asks us to realize the power of smallness again. It moves us to recommit ourselves to re-form our own minuscule worlds to take in Christ the child, Christ the outcast, Christ the refugee, Christ the other whose strangeness frightens us but whose otherness will teach us a great deal more about the world than we know at the present time.

Christmas calls us to take our lives and break them open at the crib where Jesus waits for us today.

Mary and Joseph, scripture teaches us, went to Bethlehem because they were from the "tribe of Judah." They had to leave home to go home, in other words. It may be a Christmas lesson for all of us. Tied up in our own little worlds, we may be missing the one Jesus came to save through us unless and until we reach out to it.

Hope, repentance, contentment, commitment, and smallness are the Christmas gifts this year's Advent readings can prepare in us so that we finally celebrate the feast day in ourselves, not simply the memory of another one that we are forever tempted to keep at the comfortable distance of 2,000 years.

The Cosmic Christ:

By Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico and the author of numerous books.

To get a proper divine conversation started and going, we all have to think of God as a "person" somehow. Otherwise there is no reciprocity, mutuality, give and take, no ONE to love, no "I" and Thou." Humans only know how to relate to other persons initially. But if you stay there too long, you pay a big price, because God ends up being on the other end of YOUR conversation, which keeps God SEPARATE and somehow in need of daily "appeasement." True intimacy is pretty hard to experience at this level, at least for long.

The whole point of prayer is to lead you to experience and say what Jesus finally says: "I and the Father are one!" (John 10:30). Then you do not pray to God as much as you pray THROUGH and WITH God. (Note how the official liturgical prayers end "THROUGH Christ our Lord. Amen.")

Eventually you must stop looking AT reality, and you will learn to look OUT FROM reality! This is a major and heart stopping change, and admittedly most people never go to this mystical level—because they were not taught very well, frankly. It is not because they are not worthy or incapable, but they usually feel unworthy and

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A compassionate God acts now, through us:

This is the text of a letter sent to Santa Clara University faculty and staff by SCU President Fr. Paul Locatelli in December 1999 and printed in the San Jose Mercury.

... Jesus calls Christians to this beautiful and inspiring vision for all people, as Isaiah did earlier with the ancient Israelites: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. . . . Make straight. . . a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low. . . . The poetic image of the smooth highway for God will also be ours when we help awaken God's presence and life deep down in every person and in our communities. Isaiah's valleys



to be filled are not about geological crevices in the earth, but about people who suffer, who are lonely and neglected, and whose lives are empty of meaning.

It is whenever street children are forgotten by their families and society, or the single mother is left without the means to provide food and shelter for her child. . . . When we seek to lift others out of the deep valleys of life, we too will speak tenderly and give comfort to God's people. When Isaiah refers to every mountain and hill being made low, he is not talking

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A Christmas blessing:

- ✠ May there be harmony in all your relationships. May sharp words, envious thoughts, and hostile feelings be dissolved.
- ✠ May you give and receive love generously. May this love echo in your heart like the joy of church bells on a clear December day.
- ✠ May each person who comes into your life be greeted as another Christ. May the honor given the Babe of Bethlehem be that which you extend to every guest who enters your presence.
- ✠ May the wonder and awe that fills the eyes of children be awakened within you. May it lead you to renewed awareness and appreciation of whatever you too easily take for granted.
- ✠ May the bonds of love for one another be strengthened as you gather with your family and friends around the table of festivity and nourishment.
- ✠ May you daily open the gift of your life and be grateful for the hidden treasures it contains.
- ✠ May the coming year be one of good health for you. May you have energy and vitality. May you care well for your body, mind, and spirit.
- ✠ May you go often to the Bethlehem of your heart and visit the One who offers you peace. May you bring this peace into our world.
—Sr. Joyce Rupp

. . . God acts now, through us, continued:

about a major excavation project but rather breaking down the barriers that separate us from each other. Whatever prevents us from seeing that every person we meet is our sister or brother hinders the realization of Isaiah's inclusive vision. But by embracing diversity of people and ideas, we will build a richer community where all of us can see the glory of God fully shining in every person regardless of ethnic or cultural backgrounds, age, gender, or religious beliefs.

. . . Isaiah, in predicting that the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain, is not talking about fixing potholes in the freeways, but how we treat each other. Rough are the roads whenever a thoughtless remark is left unreconciled. Or, when our indifference makes us forget the more than one million citizens living on city streets without shelter or food. . . . The prophetic promise of comfort, revealing a compassionate and welcoming God for all people, means we are all in this together, all called to the same vision of community. God does not act in some distant time or place, but now, through us. My prayer during this holy season is that the new year will be a time when the glory of God is made visible in our reconciling of differences, in our calling each other sister or brother, in our learning to respect the culture of all whose religion or skin color is different from our own, and in our being compassionate and generous with all, as God is with us. Then, through us, the glory of God shall be revealed and we will all see it together. . . .

The Cosmic Christ, continued:

feel incapable. They are not.

When prayer naturally matures, God is not so much "A Person" out there, that I must cajole, adore, and obey, but God has become the VERY GROUND OF ALL BEING, which is in dialogue with you, loving you, receiving your praise, calling you forth, forgiving you, and revealing a gracious divine will in all things as they are. Prayer is now all the time and everywhere, as long as you are conscious and awake!

At this point it is still OK to think and talk of God as a person—as long as you know it is not really true—in the way you ordinarily use that phrase! God is no longer a mere person, but ALL of reality itself has become PERSONAL, relational, dialogical, giving and receiving, loving and loveable. God cannot be localized here or there anymore (Luke 17:20), but as the old catechism said "God is everywhere."

This is a major and important maturing in one's relationship with God, yet so few spiritual guides know how to lead us across when we think we are losing our initial faith. You indeed are! But you are finding a much deeper faith, and you must go through this necessary trial



and darkness to grow up spiritually and experience true and full intimacy with God. (Read St. John of the Cross, if you doubt me.)

For Christians the paradox is resolved in the Trinity. They can continue to relate to Jesus PERSONALLY, but when prayer becomes fully Trinitarian, as we see in the Christian mystics, God is not just A Person that they have a relationship with, but God is RELATIONSHIP ITSELF (internally in God) and draws everything into that ONE DIVINE DANCE (externally in the universe).

More and more people, I am finding, are ready for such adult Christianity and such mature spirituality (See Hebrews 5:12-13). Only then does "everything belong," and only then do we get off the childish teeter-totter and fall onto the solid ground of joy. But it will surely feel like falling!

"Don't be afraid!"

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