

FATHER MARK SCHULTE
HOMILY
Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 15, 2024

“A Week of Feasts”

My brothers and sisters, there have been several important feast days over the past seven days that are important for us to recognize. These feast days remind us of key aspects in our faith life.

The first of these feast days is the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 8th, last Sunday. The role of the Blessed Virgin Mary was foreshadowed from the very beginning in the Book of Genesis, when God said the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gn 3:15). Mary is the woman whose seed, Jesus Christ, would crush the head of the serpent (CCC 411).

Mary becomes the morning star that precedes the Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ. Her birth is the dawn that precedes the sunrise, the joyful prelude to the main event, the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. She is the most beautiful soul that God has created, second only to the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

The Birth of Mary was the birth of a natural human who is endowed with supernatural qualities, she is the Immaculate Conception (CCC 490-493). Mary is the daughter of St. Joachim and St. Anne. Born unnoticed by men, but uncommonly prepared for by God. The Birth of Mary will usher in the only triple relationship to the Triune God-Head. She is daughter to God the Father, spouse of the Holy Spirit, and mother of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

God preordained the birth of the Virgin Mary and in so doing God has preordained the rebirth of every person who will come to believe in her Son, Jesus Christ. And so, we have Mary to thank for our rebirth into eternal life.

The second feast is that of the Holy Name of Mary, September 12th. Her name is the most Spiritually powerful name that one can invoke for aid. Second only to the Sacred Name of Jesus Christ. At the Name of Jesus every knee must bend. At the Name of Mary every demon flees in terror. She is the Sovereign Queen of all the Universe, of all that is seen and unseen. Jesus is most pleased when we ask Him for something in the name of His Holy Mother, Mary.

In the Gospel, Jesus said, “If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross” (Mk 8:27-35). The third feast day is the Exultation of the Holy Cross on September 14th. This feast recalls the discovery of the true cross that Jesus was crucified on. It was found by St. Helena in 320 AD. Centuries later the cross was brought to Rome and what is left of it is housed in a basilica there. Over the centuries, many small pieces were taken from the cross as relics. Our parish has one of these relics sitting on the altar of the Blessed Mother kept there for your veneration.

The cross is the most familiar and universal Christian symbol. The cross becomes the tree of life which bears as its fruit the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ. Its fruit counteracts the poisonous fruit taken from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:1-24). The fruit of the cross is the Holy Eucharist.

The Cross is the Throne of Glory, which bore our Savior. It is our shield against evil and is a trophy of Christ's Victory over Satan. The Cross is God's instrument that lifts us up after we have fallen and our support when we are fighting the good fight.

We share in the Holy Cross of Christ when we are sick, impoverished, tired, in pain, rejected and lonely. The Cross becomes a source of purification, life, and joy, when it is accepted out of love for the sake of Christ and our neighbor. The Cross leads to patient endurance during suffering and setbacks and as such can serve to purify us and draw us closer to Christ, our God.

The fruit of the cross becomes food for the soul, as well as a source of purification like gold and silver, through the crucible of suffering. It is said that the soul is closest to Christ when it is carrying the cross. The cross becomes our most true connection to the Master and a contradiction to the world (1 Cor 1:23).

The fourth and final feast is the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15th. For good reasons, it falls directly on the heels of the Exultation of the Holy Cross. On this feast the Church reminds us of the close connection between our Lord's passion and sacrifice with the suffering of His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Mary, who is "full of grace" and the most-pure "handmaid of the Lord," offers up her suffering in intimate union with her son's suffering (Lk 1:28, 38). Taken together their suffering has infinite merit. Mary's love for Jesus was the greatest, therefore the value of her co-redemptive suffering is the greatest as well (CCC 967-970).

Simeon foretold that the sword of sorrow would pierce Mary's heart (Lk 2:35). Every time Mary looked at Jesus throughout the course of His life it would be a reminder to her of the suffering He would endure, making her suffering a lifetime of suffering.

As Mary understood the Sorrows of her Son Jesus Christ, she knows our sorrows as well. Therefore, we should have recourse to her in our time of need. For this purpose Jesus has given His Mother Mary to us His Church, as He gave her to the apostle John at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:26-27).

I have placed copies of the devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary in the back of the church. The Church encourages the practice of this devotion.

Thus we have four important feast days in a brief seven-day period, The Birth of Mary, The Most Holy Name of Mary, The Exultation of the Holy Cross, and Our Lady of Sorrows. It is fitting that the Birth of Mary and the Sorrows of Mary act as bookends for this week of Feasts.

NOTE: CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church