

HEROIC VIRTUE

Living the Call to Perfection

Ora:

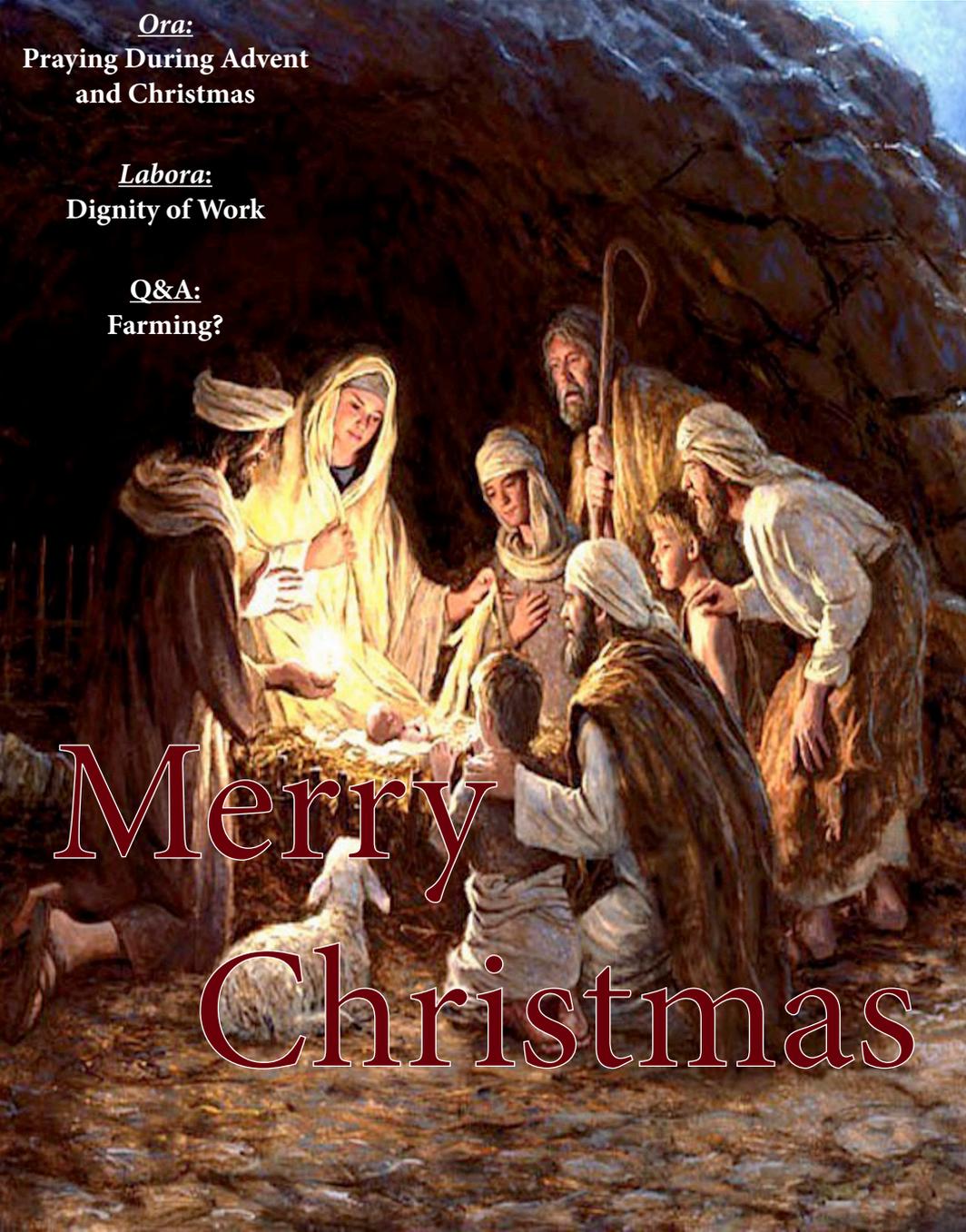
Praying During Advent
and Christmas

Labora:

Dignity of Work

Q&A:

Farming?

A detailed illustration of the Nativity scene. The Virgin Mary is seated on the left, holding the infant Jesus in her arms. Joseph is kneeling in front of the manger, looking at the child. Several other figures, including a shepherd with a staff and a young boy, are gathered around the manger. A white lamb is visible in the foreground. The scene is set in a dark, rocky cave with a warm, golden light emanating from the manger.

Merry
Christmas

Prayer During Advent and Christmas

Celebrating our Faith is an important part of our prayer life. It is good that we take time to look at the many different elements of our Faith and remember and appreciate what it is that we believe. Part of this appreciation of our faith is that it can contribute to the deepening of our love of God for whom the faith is about. This can then be used to transform our life into holiness.

For this reason, the Church has a calendar of celebrations that we celebrate every year. It is called the Liturgical Year. During the Liturgical Year, we have several days that are set aside to celebrate different aspects of our Faith: Christ the King, the Assumption, and our Guardian Angel. Other days are set aside to remember saints, our role models who walked the path of holiness before us. We remember their life and teachings that we may strive to be more like them.

In addition to the individual day-celebrations, the Church also has seasons where we prolong our look at our faith for sever days and weeks. These are: Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. Advent and Lent are times of penitential preparation for Christmas and Easter. Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus, His love for us and the dignity and beauty of life that God gave us. Easter is a time to celebrate the victory of God over death, the salvation He won for us and the place God is to hold in our hearts as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

That was an abbreviated summery of the seasons. We will look at the seasons of Lent and Easter later in the liturgical year. For now, let us break open the two seasons before us: Advent and Christmas.

As mentioned, Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas. What kind of preparation? The scary kind! The kind that is difficult, self

Q&A

HEROIC VIRTUE

Embracing Truth

Q: I understand that a hermit is dedicated to prayer, but why the farming?

A: Let us look at other religious. The Trappist monks make cheese, the monks at Jacob's Falls in the UP of Michigan make Jam, there are monks who make Mystic Monk coffee and monks in Iowa who make caskets.

We know that they need a livelihood beyond just charitable gifts. They have an obligation to earn their living like everyone else. Charitable giving is something we do to help them so that they can be free to pray more.

We need their prayers, but do we need their work? No. Rather, they need to work. On a practical note, work is healthy for the body and is necessary or the body will atrophy. It also reminds us that the world does not owe us a living just because we dedicate our life to prayer.

More importantly on a spiritual note, work keeps us humble. Work is a duty as God directed Adam and Eve after the fall when he told them that they would have to labor for their food. Work also ties us to the ongoing creation of God. While God labored for 6 days to create the world, His creation continues to this day and he invites us to participate in that work of the ongoing building of the Kingdom of God on earth.

I am no different than the other religious. A small hobby farm is just what has come to be my work. But I do more than that. I am also the Chaplain for a small community in Lansing. This is actually what supports me financially. The farm should, when it is fully up and running, pay for itself. That is all I need it to do as it is there more to give me a source of manual labor than to support me financially.

Submit your questions to: fr@getholy.com

revelatory and will convict you to the core and inspire you to fuller conversion.

This preparation should keep in view what it is preparing for the birth of Christ! Think about what a husband and wife go through when they find out that they are with child, especially the first time. It is scary. They are looking at all the preparation they must do to have a room ready, obtaining a crib, diapers, clothing, and toys. Then there are all the other expenses, and the anxiety of wondering if they will be a good mommy or daddy. They will need a name. Two of them until they figure out if the baby is a boy or a girl. And so many other things.

Preparing for Christmas should be just like that. As a husband and wife prepare for a child to be born into their life, so in Advent we prepare for Christ to be born into our heart. Yes, He is there by virtue of baptism, unless we have committed mortal sin, but I am speaking of remembering and appreciating that Christ is born in our hearts. He is there and we need to make sure time and again that we have a room suitable for him. Is the room (our soul) adorned with virtue, are we worried about how good of a Christian we will make for Him and so many other areas to be looked at.

Another aspect of the birth of Christ is not just that He is born in our hearts, but that we, like the Blessed Mother, must give birth to Christ into the world. As Mary gave birth to Christ into the world, making Him present to the world, we must give birth to Him as well. We are called to make Christ present in the world by our actions.

The third aspect of the birth of Christ is the role of Joseph. He is the foster father of Jesus. He is the protector of the Holy Family and He is the teacher of a trade (carpentry) to his son, Jesus.

We “adopt” Jesus to be our God. Think about it, we could adopt any number of other beliefs to hold in our hearts, but we choose Jesus. We protect and defend the Faith and the Holy Name of Jesus, at whose name every knee must bend. We labor in the world to build the kingdom of God on earth. That is our trade.

And the forth point to Christmas is the Epiphany. The three kings who come to adore our God. When people look at us, do they see Christ? We call ourselves the Body of Christ, then should we not look like the body of Christ, act like the Body of Christ and speak as the Body of Christ? When people see us they should see and experience Christ! Are they inspired by what they see in us the same as the three kings were inspired by Jesus in the manger?

As the three kings laid their gifts before the King, are we ready, willing and able to lay our very life down before Him? We are not the little drummer boy with no gifts to bring. The music we play for Jesus is our very life. Every virtue we do for His honor, glory and praise is but a single note of a symphony called life.

And more:

Manger = Bread of Life, Eucharist

Star = light of the world, beacon of truth...

Baby = life, importance of life, dignity of life, sanctity of life

All these points and more are part of the preparation for Christmas. We are called to meditate on them and why it is so important that Jesus came into the world to be like us in every way but sin.

We must meditate on our readiness to reaffirm our baptismal calling and to take those steps to manifest our commitment to become holy as our Father in heaven is holy. We look at our own personal mistakes as why Jesus had to come into the world.

Advent is an intense time. It is a beautiful time. Pray and use it well and you will have a Christmas experience that will knock your socks off. Having prepared well for Christmas, we will be ready to celebrate its true meaning and have an encounter with God that will transform us and empower us to live the life that is worthy of one of God's children.

In the HOPE that you have that kind of Christmas, I will pray for you.

Dignity of Work

Work in our society/culture is seen as a dirty little 4 letter word. It is seen as something that we have to do because of the Fall and therefore it is a punishment. We feel this punishment every time we have to get up and go to work. Eight hours of drudgery. It is tedious and unfulfilling labor that only merits a paycheck that often is not enough to pay the bills or is not enough to live the style of life we desire. There is no comfort to work, that is why it is called work. If it provided comfort or entertainment, we would call it fun and not work. People try to do the least amount of work they can get away with and still get their pay. The current welfare system is great for those with this mindset. People also try to retire as soon and as young as they can so that they can “enjoy some of life.” This says that to work is to not to be able to enjoy life.

What if there was a different way? What if work could be a part of enjoying life and finding personal fulfillment? What if work could be seen as a blessing from God rather than as punishment? What if work could be seen as a form of prayer and a way of sanctifying man? What if work could be seen as having meaning and purpose?

This is going to be an ongoing discussion in this section of Heroic Virtue. I am going to simply set the direction of the discussion in today's issue.

I have seen the problem for a long time that labor is not respected by so many people. The idea that work is beneath me is not a Christian concept. Not even close. This is true of manual labor, intellectual labor and spiritual labor. As a people of God, work is not a sad state of affairs, but part and parcel of our human dignity. It is essential to who we are and what we want to be. Like our intellect, work is what separates us from animals. Animals work out of instinct for the purpose of survival and nothing more. For human beings, we work for more than survival, as important as survival is to us. We work as a way to define ourselves, and our communities. Work builds society and civility. Work contributes to the idea of leisure and the arts, of

bettering ones self and the world around us. While some animals may work together as a pack, humans work together as a community, not with the mindset of survival of the fittest, but the survival of all (speaking from an idealist perspective, unfortunately there is still selfishness that messes with this point).

In the end, if we really look at what work is, it is a cooperation with God in building the kingdom of God on earth.

Those for religious liberty will not like that last point. But it is true. We are to build a Christian culture. Yes we are to be tolerant of other religious beliefs in the mean time, but if we truly believe what we believe as Catholics, that we are the one true Faith, established by Jesus Christ, then that is the only Faith we can promote. While people may have a secular right to belong to whatever belief they want, they do not have a religious or moral right to do so. God calls us all to be Catholic. That is the Faith He has established to fulfill and complete the work He began with the Jewish faith (the only other faith He has ever established, but considers defunct today).

As we look at work in our own lives, we can not control what others will do or why they will do it. We are responsible for ourselves. With this in mind, I will be looking at work/labor from many different perspectives and how as Catholics we will be able to embrace labor in our lives as a way to build the Kingdom of God on earth, contribute to the good of mankind, atone for personal sin, contribute to our sanctification and to find blessings and fulfillment in our personal lives.

As we walk this road of understanding together, please remember that this priest with consecrated hands is right there with you as I shovel excrement each day. It is not beneath me and I do it for love of you. We need to work. It is good for the body and soul. All the labor we do to care for the world God has blessed us with honors and glorifies Him. He in turn pours out His abundant grace upon us. That is a wage well worth the labor. Or as Scripture puts it, the laborer deserves his wage.

We are still getting started.

Due to a generous donation, for which I am very appreciative, it looks like I will be able to build the extension on the barn this December.

The 16 foot extension will be divided into two halves (16'x20' ea). One half is for the pigs and the other is for the cow. With this, all my animals will be in the same building. Wrangler (horse) already has a stall in the barn. Then, when I go out to care for them every morning and evening, I only have to go into one building and everything I need is there. This will be especially convenient in the winter or when it rains.

Speaking of the pigs, I had my first batch of babies. Four of them. Two have already been sold. The other two I am keeping, one for meat, the other to bread one time and then for meat.

While I have sold a little hay, this sale of the pigs was my first real sale from farming. It paid for all the fencing I had to put up this year to expand the pig pasture and some of the grain too. It seems the farm is starting to pay for itself.

There will be one other big building adventure next year. That will be the selling of the manufactured home I currently live in and building my home in the current walk out basement. The house is just too big for the sense of solitude I need with God. This project will eliminate about two-thirds of my living space.

If you know someone who needs a 60'x26' manufactured home with a new kitchen, new siding, new windows and a new roof, please have them contact me. I have put a lot of work and money into it, but no matter what I do, it is just still too big for a hermit to live in. It should make a nice home for somebody.

Also looking at a garden next year - HMMMM, we will see.