

- As I mentioned last Sunday, with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord two weeks ago, we are now in what is called “Ordinary Time” in the new liturgical calendar.
- This is the longest of the liturgical seasons, and it is dedicated to honoring the mystery of Christ in its fullness, and not just specific mysteries.
- Yet I wonder if “ordinary” is the best way to designate this period of the year, for since the Advent of our Lord’s Incarnation 2000 years ago, there really is nothing ordinary about time anymore.
- You see, the fact that our eternal and infinite Lord became man was no ordinary event. It was a wholly extraordinary event, as Christ’s conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary was an intersection between heaven and earth, between the invisible and the visible, between infinity and finitude, between eternity and time.
- Indeed, with the in-breaking of eternity into the finitude of time, time itself has now been radically changed: time has been sanctified.
- The rest of human history will always be marked and measured by our Lord’s presence on earth. The people of old understood this, and this is why when calendars in the western world were devised, a division was made between the time before our Lord’s birth and the time after it.
- The anno domini (“AD”) that we see with the number of the year together denote for us how many years it has been since that pivotal moment in human history when our Lord appeared in human flesh.
- Those secularists and academics who of late have been insisting that we change the designation “AD” to “CE” for “Common Era,” are actually denying our Lord’s Incarnation.
- In doing so they are denying the central event in human history: that God, in His love and mercy, became one of us. Not only are they denying this central event in human history, but they are also denying something fundamental to our human nature.
- You see, not only did our Lord’s Incarnation change and ennoble the very nature of time; it changed and ennobled human nature as well!
- We, who once were lost because of the disobedience of our first parents, now have the Savior so long awaited by God’s chosen people. Salvation has become possible! And our weak human flesh has found new dignity in our Lord’s taking it upon Himself.
- And the salvation that our Lord brings is not only for His chosen people. As Sts. Peter and Paul both discovered and agreed, God’s salvation is for all people, Jew and Gentile alike.
- Thus we have the beautiful words of Isaiah today in our first reading: “Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: for there is no gloom where but now there was distress. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.”
- With our Lord’s incarnation and subsequent passion, death, and resurrection, sin no longer has to be the defining and central characteristic of human nature. For while it is true that we are still sinners, we are redeemed and can be saved despite our sins!
- This is a most crucial distinction that as Christians must direct our lives. This knowledge of our redemption must form our hearts, our minds, and thus our behavior!
- Again, as Isaiah tells us today: “For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.”

- Jesus Christ, our Incarnate Lord, is now our light and our salvation, and we who know Him and love Him may dwell in His house. We may gaze upon His loveliness and contemplate His temple! Thus, despair has no place in the heart of the Christian.
- While we still have our daily struggles with sin and temptation, Christ Jesus Himself is our remedy. And we need only to turn to Him with sorrow for our sins to receive that mercy that will open up for us the gates of Heaven!
- Thus we have in today's Gospel Jesus giving us a very simple and direct command: "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When our Lord says that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, I think we can understand this in two senses.
- First, there is the imperative sense in which our Lord is reminding us that we never know when we will have to face our Maker. There is an immediacy to His words, and He wants us to be ready at a moment's notice for Heaven.
- But we must also remember that as Catholics, we know that Heaven can be experienced even now – at least in a limited and nascent way – through prayer and the Sacraments.
- You see, my dear brothers and sisters, Heaven isn't so much a place as it is Person! In Heaven we will be united with our Triune Lord for all eternity. And through our prayer and the grace of the Sacraments, we can begin to experience Heaven even now!
- And so our lives as Christians should be a matter of continual repentance, always seeking to grow in holiness by the constant turning away from those sins that tempt us, and doing our best to correct our faults and failings.
- But today's Gospel also shows us that the life of the Christian must also be marked and measured by our obedience to our Lord and our willingness to follow Him, just as we see in the apostle brothers Andrew and Peter and James and John today.
- I love this passage because in this little vignette from the life of Christ we see the power Jesus has to attract followers to Himself, a power strong enough to draw men away from their livelihoods, to drop everything and follow Him.
- What I believe must have drawn the apostles was the fullness of truth, beauty, and goodness that Christ possesses within Himself.
- This calling of Jesus that we see being given to the apostles is given to all men. On a most fundamental level, our Lord calls to each person through one's conscience and the natural law. In the depths of our consciences, every man is given the opportunity to hear our Lord's voice and to know what is right and wrong so that we might follow Him.
- But our Lord also calls to us more directly through the preaching of the Gospel, which has been the Church's primary task ever since Pentecost.
- Every time we hear or read the Scriptures, every time we listen to a homily that is faithful to the Church's teachings, we are called by Christ to follow Him, just as Andrew, Peter, James and John were called in our Gospel story.
- My brothers and sisters, in His mercy and love our eternal Lord has broken into the limits of time and become man. In doing so, He has not only ennobled time, but He has ennobled our human nature as well and made salvation possible.
- In His love and mercy, our Lord constantly calls each us to Himself. May we hear His voice and heed His call by repenting of our sins! May we whole-heartedly believe that Jesus is our light and our salvation so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.
- May Jesus Christ be praised, now and forever!