

Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Homily of Bishop John Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

September 8, 2021

In his great and classic work of Spiritual Theology, *Divine Intimacy*, the great Carmelite spiritual theologian Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, OCD, writes: “The birth of Mary is the dawn of our redemption; her appearance projects a new light over all the human race: a light of innocence, of purity, of grace, a resplendent presage of the great light which will inundate the world when Christ, the Light of the World, appears.”¹

What a joy to celebrate together today the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 8th which, of course, is so deeply connected to the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception that we celebrate on December 8th.

In fact, when we start with the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated nine months after the Immaculate Conception.

Our Catholic liturgical calendar is filled with these contemplative connections designed to stir and motivate our spirit of faith and worship as well as our devotion to Mary.

We celebrate together on this great Feast the unity of God’s plan in Salvation history.

We celebrate that Our Lady’s birth into human history and the special graces she received in order to be the Mother of God, the *Theotokos*, all foreshadowed and are connected to the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus Christ -- the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Alpha and the Omega -- into actual human history.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of Lord*, Pope Benedict XVI writes: “As we contemplate in the Mother of God a life totally shaped by the word, we realize that we too are called to enter into the mystery of faith, whereby Christ comes to dwell in our lives. Every Christian believer, Saint Ambrose reminds us, in some way

¹ Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, OCD, *Divine Intimacy*, (New York: Desclee Company, 1963), 1152.

interiorly conceives and gives birth to the word of God: even though there is only one Mother of Christ in the flesh, in the faith Christ is the progeny of us all. Thus, what took place for Mary can daily take place in each of us, in the hearing of the word and in the celebration of the sacraments.” (28)

We also connect this September 8th Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady to the upcoming September 15th Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows.

From the moment of her birth, Mary was destined to have a sword pierce her heart as she stood at the foot of the Cross contemplating the death of her Son. As the *woman of the Word* and the *woman of the Eucharist*, Mary models for us how to enter into and live the mystical rhythm of the Catholic Mass.

Professor David Fagerberg writes: “The Church lives by presenting offerings. Mary presented Jesus to God at both the beginning and the end of her Son’s mission: in the temple when the Presentation of Jesus fulfilled the commandment in Exodus 13:12 for a family to offer their firstborn son to God, and on Calvary, where Mary united herself with a maternal heart to his sacrifice, consenting to his immolation. The sword that Simeon foretold would pierce her soul cleaved the natural union of mother and son and let her offer her son to the Father. The liturgy lives by the same action. The liturgy only lives through oblation. Mary’s life shows a mingling of oblations: first she offered herself, at the Annunciation, then she offered her Son, standing beneath his Cross. We likewise offer Jesus in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and when we do so, we must be offering ourselves with him. The excellence of the Sacrifice of the Mass comes from the fact that it is in substance the same sacrifice as that of the Cross. Jesus continues really to offer himself, the same victim present on Calvary’s altar before Mary’s eyes and present on the liturgical altar before our eyes. The Church’s liturgy must always, always stand under the Cross, united to his sacrifice. If the Church wanders from this location, she will have lost her reason for being.”²

And we always stand under the Cross with Mary whose birth – which changed the course of Salvation history -- we celebrate today.

² David Fagerberg, *Liturgical Dogmatics: How Catholic Beliefs Flow from Liturgical Prayer*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2021), 242.

