Schola Brevis

November 28, 2022

I want to welcome you back after what I hope was a relaxing and well-deserved Thanksgiving holiday. We return to begin the second term. We also return to a new liturgical year that begins with the season of Advent. This is the season when we prepare for the birth of Christ, which is not only a past event. It is also an ongoing reality stretching into the future when he will come again in power and majesty at the end of time.

Sometimes, when I need a reason to smile, I will watch some of the home videos on YouTube that parents take of their babies and toddlers. Mom and dad display a wide range of feelings, including wonder and awe, accompanied by tears and smiles when holding their newborn infant in their arms. Then there is the genuine, spontaneous laughter when their toddler babbles about something or looks bewildered as they explore this new world they never imagined while in the womb. Those of you who are parents or have brothers or sisters who are infants or toddlers can enjoy those YouTube moments without having to go to YouTube.

That might help you to appreciate the Church's vigorous defense of the sanctity of life beginning with the moment of conception when God breathes the soul into this new creation and, some say, blesses it with a kiss. When holding their newly born infant for the first time, mothers will instinctively welcome them with a kiss, and dad will eventually follow suit. In our heart of hearts, you and I know that is how it is supposed to be. The images associated with preventing this from happening, as when a fetus is aborted, stands in marked contrast to what I have just described.

Did you know that every Mass is also a celebration of the birth of Christ? On Sundays, feast days, and solemnities, the Church recites or sings the Gloria that begins with the words, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2: 14) It is as if that evening when the angels appeared to the shepherds and spoke those words announcing the birth of Jesus miraculously has been teleported to this present time. We are both the recipients and proclaimers of that angelic message with which we welcome the Risen Christ.

At the consecration during Mass, the bread and wine give birth to him when both are changed into His Body and Blood. Christ becomes really and substantially present just as he was when the shepherds came to adore him in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes.

As a review for Catholics and as a commentary for those of you from other Christian churches, denominations, and religious traditions, during Mass when Catholics receive Holy Communion, the priest, deacon, or Eucharistic minister places the consecrated host in the palm of our hand. We are to imagine ourselves holding the infant Jesus and to bless him with a smile.

Do you see how clever Jesus is? He is making it easy for you—7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders, faculty, and staff—to feel comfortable in his presence. He comes in peace no matter how sinful or unworthy you may feel. In the sacred host you are privileged to hold, the Lord of the Universe, through whom the heavenly Father breathed your soul, gave you life, called you by name, and blessed you with a kiss, has made himself just as vulnerable in your hands as when Mary and St. Joseph held him in theirs.

When consuming the host, imagine yourself placing him in your heart of hearts that serves a manger. There he will rest comfortably on the straw of the good deeds and acts of penance you do for this purpose, especially during Advent. In this way, the gift of divine life received at baptism is strengthened and nurtured.

In Holy Communion, Jesus is fulfilling his dream to walk in easy friendship with humankind as he had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. He came to restore that friendship costing him his life to do so. Jesus is not just another teacher, healer, guru, or philosopher. He is our Lord and Savior, truly divine and truly human. He suffered, died, rose from the dead, and did that for you and me. In baptism, he has called each of you by name, given you a share in his divine life, a role to play in advancing the reign of God here on earth, and to be with him in heaven.

Everything the Church does, everything this school does, has as its purpose to cultivate, nurture, enliven and deepen your love for Christ, whose love for you cost him his life. When you walk out the doors of Marist, we want you to know that in your heart of hearts, Jesus wants to walk with you in easy friendship, as he had done with our first parents in the Garden of Eden before the fall. That is his dream for you and all humanity. That is the message of Christmas, which must first be real for you before you can bring that reality to others. They may not know him, but they long for him nonetheless.

That is the work of Mary, which this school has made its own and regards as a labor of love.

Mary, seat of Wisdom, pray for us.