

Dear Padre,

I went to confession, and then, months later, my priest was removed for alcoholism and theft. Is my confession still worthy?

Your confession is not dependent on the worthiness or the unworthiness of the priest. Your confession is made to Jesus; the priest is a witness who pronounces the words of absolution that Jesus intended in the sacrament. "From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1128).

The question of the efficacy of the sacrament and the unworthiness of the minister who performs the sacrament in the name of the Church is not new. During the time of persecution, in the early centuries of the Church, some people, including priests and bishops, avoided martyrdom by offering the required oblation to Caesar. Later, they repented and returned to the Christian community, a community that included the surviving family and friends of the men and women who were martyred. The question was asked, and with some animated energy, "How could these ministers who sinned to save their own lives now represent the Church?" The answer, arrived at with patience and discernment, is that the minister is only the representative of the sacrament, not the source of the sacrament. Jesus is faithful, even when his ministers have been unfaithful. ●

Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR / DearPadre.org



A WORD FROM POPE LEO XIV



I think it is important for all of us to learn how to listen more, to enter into dialogue. First and foremost, with the Lord: always listen to the word of God. Then also listen

to others, to know how to build bridges, to know how to listen without judging, not closing the doors [and] thinking that we have all the truth and no one else can tell us anything.

HOMILY, ROME, MAY 11, 2025

Monday

December 22
Advent Weekday
1 Sm 1:24–28
Lk 1:46–56

Tuesday

December 23
Advent Weekday
Mal 3:1–4, 23–24
Lk 1:57–66

Wednesday

December 24
Advent Weekday
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16
Lk 1:67–79

Thursday

December 25
The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)
Is 52:7–10
Heb 1:1–6
Jn 1:1–18 or 1:1–5, 9–14

Friday

December 26
St. Stephen, the First Martyr
Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59
Mt 10:17–22

Saturday

December 27
St. John, Apostle and Evangelist
1 Jn 1:1–4
Jn 20:1a, 2–8

Sunday

December 28
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
Sir 3:2–6, 12–14
Col 3:12–21 or 3:12–17
Mt 2:13–15, 19–23

Do you have a question for the Padre?

Go to DearPadre.org to send your question and to learn more about *Dear Padre*.

Our Parish COMMUNITY

December 21, 2025

Fourth Sunday of Advent (A)

Isaiah 7:10–14 / Romans 1:1–7 / Matthew 1:18–24



Close Enough!

MIGUEL DULICK

It is the fourth Sunday of Advent. When Christmas is this close, one takes that final leap. Isaiah is centuries from Christmas, but he cannot wait! He sees the "sign" as clear as day: "the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son" (Isaiah 7:14). And how about that Son! None other than "Emmanuel" himself—God-With-Us! Paul, too, is bursting at the seams! Inspired by what he calls "the obedience of faith" (Romans 5), he is excited to see the gospel thriving even among the Gentiles. For him, the "Spirit of holiness" is a gift offered to all—Christmas every day, you might say.

Speaking of "obedience of faith," Joseph is the perfect example. The word "obey" comes from the same root as "to hear," and Joseph has almost supernatural ears! Matthew, the former tax collector, tells "how the birth of Jesus Christ came about" in today's gospel reading like a bookkeeper—the Holy Spirit in Column A, Joseph in Column B, with Mary in the middle. But when an angel whispers to Joseph at night, his dream comes true: "he took his wife into his home." Everything is set for Emmanuel!

So, the Bible is brimming with Christmas, that is, "God-With-Us," from end to end. And when a virgin can conceive, are any of us exempt from "birthing" Jesus in our midst? Even when a "happy holiday" seems impossible in the midst of war or violence or poverty, when our ears hear only silence, let's sing Christmas carols every day! ●

Reflect

How am I at listening? Can I find new insights in old stories that I think I know so well?



The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus."

MATTHEW 1:20–21



SCAN TO LEARN ABOUT AUTHOR MIGUEL DULICK



OUR MISSION
Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20, NAB-RE)

ST. JOHN NEUMANN PARISH & CHURCH OFFICE, 714 Tenth Avenue, Marlinton WV 24954
ST. MARK THE EVANGELIST MISSION, 92 Catholic Church Road, Rts 250 & 92, Bartow WV 24920
ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX CHAPEL, 6332 Snowshoe Drive, Snowshoe WV 26209
Telephone: St. John Neumann 304-799-6778, St. Bernard of Clairvaux 304-572-0847
Website: PocahontasCatholic.org
E-mail: Pastor@PocahontasCatholic.org



Patty Bryant
Margaret Bryant
Ann Burke
Danielle Cade
Dick Connor
Dale Kinnison
Drema Moore
Cynthia Olson
Quinn Riffle
Tristan Sizemore

EUCHARIST THIS WEEK

Monday	8:00 a.m.	St. John
Wednesday	5:00 p.m.	St. Mark
	9:00 p.m.	St. Bernard
Thursday	10:00 a.m.	St. John
Saturday	5:30 p.m.	St. Bernard
Sunday	9:00 a.m.	St. John
	11:30 a.m.	St. Mark



St. John Neumann Church is open for private prayer every day during daylight.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered before each Eucharist or by appointment, and at St. Bernard on Saturdays 4:30-5:00 p.m.

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is available any time upon request.



Please call the Church office (304-799-6778) if you know of a parishioner who is sick, in the hospital or nursing home, homebound, deployed, or in prison.

To report an incidence of suspected child sexual abuse, please contact your local law enforcement agency, or you may confidentially contact WV Child Protective Services at 800-352-6513.

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact the Diocese at 888-434-6237 or 304-233-0880.

To report suspected cases of sexual misconduct or sexual abuse by a bishop or eparch, please contact ReportBishopAbuse.org or call 800-276-1562.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

"It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."
(Matthew 1:20, NAB-RE)

ANNOUNCEMENTS & NOTES

- **Christmas schedule** is under "Eucharist This Week."
- **Christmas decorating** will be after Mass this Sunday (December 21) at St. John Neumann and St. Mark the Evangelist. Everyone is welcome to participate.
- **Advent community prayer service** is every Wednesday at noon at Marlinton United Methodist Church. Bring a bag lunch and stay after for some fellowship.
- **The Jubilee Year of Hope** began on 24 December 2024 and ends on 6 January 2026. In the



Book of Leviticus (25:8-55), the jubilee is the 50th year following the 49th year (7x7), and the jubilee is

a time of renewal, forgiveness, liberty, care for the poor, and return of property. In the Catholic Church, we celebrate a jubilee year twice during each jubilee. The next *Jubilee Year* will be in 2050!

LAST WEEKEND

	<u>attendance</u>	<u>collection</u>
St. John Neumann	33	\$657.00
Religious Retirement fund		\$30.00
Fund for the Poor		\$20.00
Votive Candles		\$10.00
K of C Christmas cards		\$20.00
St. Mark the Evangelist	17	\$260.00
Religious Retirement fund		\$20.00
St. Bernard Chapel	55	\$328.00
Fund for the Poor		\$145.00
total	105	\$1,490.00



Fund for the Poor
\$1,036.80 distributed in November
in direct aid for those in need.



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FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - YEAR A

First Reading (Isaiah 7:10-14)

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying:
Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God;
let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky!
But Ahaz answered,
"I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!"
Then Isaiah said:
Listen, O house of David!
Is it not enough for you to weary people,
must you also weary my God?
Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign:
the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall name him Emmanuel.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, *Grail translation 1995*)

Response: Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

The LORD's is the earth and its fullness,
the world and all its peoples.
It is God who set it on the seas;
who made it firm on the waters.

Who shall climb the mountain of the LORD?
Who shall stand in his holy place?
Those with clean hands and pure heart,
who desire not worthless things.

They shall receive blessings from the LORD
and reward from the God who saves them.
Such are the ones who seek,
seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Second Reading (Romans 1:1-7)

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus,
called to be an apostle
and set apart for the gospel of God,
which he promised previously through his prophets
in the holy Scriptures,
the gospel about his Son, descended from David
according to the flesh,
but established as Son of God in power
according to the Spirit of holiness
through resurrection from the dead,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through him we have received the grace of apostleship,
to bring about the obedience of faith,
for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles,
among whom are you also,
who are called to belong to Jesus Christ;
to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy.
Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Acclamation (Matthew 1:23)

The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel.

Gospel (Matthew 1:18-24)

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,
but before they lived together,
she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.
Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,
decided to divorce her quietly.
Such was his intention when, behold,
the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream
and said,
"Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.
For it is through the Holy Spirit
that this child has been conceived in her.
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins."
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said
through the prophet:
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means "God is with us."
When Joseph awoke,
he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and took his wife into his home.

Reflection (2022)

In the account announcing the birth of Jesus recorded by St. Matthew, the angel tells Joseph that his wife-to-be is pregnant, and Joseph knew it was not by him. But the angel says “do not be afraid.” And so, Joseph was not afraid, and took Mary to be his wife.

How often are we confronted with something we don't understand, or something that causes us to fear? How do we react? Do we have anyone near us to support us, and help us through our confusion or fear? For Joseph, God assured him through the message of the angel. God is there to assure us too, and his messengers might just be the people closest to us. But rest assured, no matter what, God is close to us always.

Reflection (2025)

As we plan for Christmas, perhaps with decorating and gift buying, and a lot of stress about this and that, the Gospel today tells us how planning for Jesus' birth was taking place for Joseph and Mary. What Joseph planned was to marry Mary, and become a husband and father. What Mary planned was to marry Joseph and become a wife and mother. What they planned was to raise a family like every normal Jewish family. But everything turned out to be full of surprise and unlike anything they planned.

That's so much like our own lives. How often we have everything planned, and we *expect*, or at least *hope*, that things will turn out just as we *planned*, and just as we *want*. But so often, things turn out very differently. The best of plans don't always turn out as we plan. Do we get disappointed, or do we see the possibility that something better might come about?

For Joseph and Mary, their plans were changed by the message of an angel and the intervention of the Holy Spirit. But their plans were changed for the better, because along came Jesus, the Messiah, and our salvation. And everything changed for the better for us as well, and that's what we will celebrate this week at Christmas – God's plan that is so much better than our plans.

21 December 2025
Fourth Sunday of Advent - Year A

Penitential Rite

I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.
May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.
Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Faithful

Merciful Father, you offer us life, the means to sustain life, and hope for the life to come. We ask you now to listen to our petitions:

- for our Church leaders, that they will lead humble simple lives, we pray
- for our political leaders, that they will extend the same benefits that they receive to those whom they serve, we pray
- for pregnant women and those with small children, that they will receive the support and care they need, we pray
- for peace among all the descendants of Abraham, we pray
- for all of us gathered for Eucharist, that we will prepare spiritually for the celebration of Christmas, we pray
- for all those who have died, that they will be saved, we pray
- and for your other intentions
(*pause*)
for all our intentions spoken and unspoken, we pray

Almighty Father, draw us ever closer to you, and hear our prayers and answer them in your mercy. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.