

# **Journey to the Incarnation**

Christmas Novena: A Reflective Examination of Conscience  
through the Lens of the Beatitudes



*"he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."*  
Philippians 2:7

# How To Guide

For this year's Christmas Novena, the Salesian communications, vocation, and youth ministry offices collaborated to create a multimedia resource that contains both a video component and a written prayer guide.

## 1. Video

First, you are invited to watch the accompanying videos, which will be uploaded to YouTube (at Salesians of Don Bosco) and updated each day on Instagram (@salesiansue) and Facebook (@SalesianSUE).

## 2. Reflection

Next, you are invited to prayerfully read the extended reflections for each Beatitude included in this guide.

## 3. Examination of Conscience

Next, we invite you to reflect on the questions that are provided as a brief examination of conscience for you - in light of each day's Beatitude and reflection. This also could be a moment of group discussion and sharing.

## 4. Prayer

Lastly, there is a short prayer to close your time of reflection.

### **Note:**

This resource is designed to be used anywhere: in schools, youth centers, homes, or parishes, and to be used by anyone: communities, individuals, young adults, married couples, religious orders, or single men and women! We invite all members of the Salesian Family to join us in praying this novena.

# Day 1

## Introduction: What is holiness?

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### Reflection

by Fr. Steve DeMaio, SDB

“Salesian Spirituality, molded by the experiences of Francis de Sales and relaunched by John Bosco, emphasizes what Vatican II would come to term *the universal call to holiness*.” (Boenzi, Life & Spirit, 9) All of us are called to holiness, but what exactly does that mean? Over these next days as we pray the novena to prepare for Christmas, we will reflect on holiness with the help of Pope Francis’s encyclical *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad!). He took each beatitude, explaining how the word “happy” or “blessed” becomes a synonym for “holy.” However, this holiness should be understood as flowing from the emptying of ourselves in self-giving sacrificial love, which is exactly what God has done in the Incarnation. God became man and dwelt among us; He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. (Philippians 2:7) Yet, God came to us not in some romantic or idealistic way but in our world, with all its division, fear, suffering as well as its joy and hope. During this novena we will place ourselves in the Bethlehem of today which represents for us our own reality. God meets us where we are, not where we should be. Jesus, called Emmanuel, is ‘God-among-us’ who became one of us so that we could become like him. Let us take these next 8 days to reflect on what needs to be changed about how we live, in order to become who we were created to be; a saint.

### Examination of Conscience

- *Take some time to reflect on your current situation. Be honest with yourself. What is going on in your life right now? What are your joys and sorrows? Are you speaking with God on a daily basis? Are you happy? Do you find meaning in your day-to-day life?*
- *Take a few moments in silence.*

### Prayer

Our Father...

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.

# Day 2

## **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

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### **Reflection**

by Fr. Steve DeMaio, SDB

Our happiness is always determined by the condition of our heart. Poor, rich, young, old, male or female...each of us must, at the end of the day, answer to the silent but profound rhythm of our hearts. Jesus begins his beatitudes with poverty. To be simple. To be detached. To become more and more like Him who emptied himself completely, who “made himself poor,” and showed us the way to love with a simple and poor heart. Poverty has the potential to enslave or to set free, to corrupt or to give new life, to destroy or to build up. It all depends on the heart. A heart filled with grace and a deep desire to empty itself in service will be set free and will awaken to the Kingdom of Heaven all around. It all comes down to trust. Do I trust that God is enough? Do I trust that God will provide? Is there room in my heart for God? To begin our journey to Christmas, we must pray for the poverty, humility and simplicity so as to welcome our God who has come to dwell among us.

**Being poor in heart, that is holiness.**

### **Examination of Conscience**

- *What is my understanding of poverty? What does it mean to live simply? How am I being called to poverty? What does this poverty look like (e.g. physical, spiritual)?*
- *Do I invite God each day to empty me of “myself” so that I can be filled with His Spirit and be better able to serve others? What are some practical steps I can take to be simpler?*

### **Prayer**

Jesus, You emptied yourself, becoming poor, in order to become a servant to all humanity. Help me to be inspired this Christmas to empty myself completely for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.

# Day 3

**Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

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## Reflection

by Julia St. Clair

When we lose someone or something in life, our grief can take us to dark places. We often wonder if we will ever know happiness again, and the resulting anxiety and depression can separate us from God and our true selves, who He made us to be. During this Christmas season, let us know that there is someone out there who stands by us as we mourn and comforts us. Let us have faith and know that God has a plan for us, not to make us suffer, but to give us hope and a future beyond our wildest dreams. We can do anything and everything through Christ who strengthens us, and that includes making it through our lives' best and worst moments. God hears our prayers; when we trust in Him and let go, He will give us the answers, and we will one day look back on this time in our lives with triumphant smiles for we have made it through thanks to Him.

**Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness.**

## Examination of Conscience

- *When did I mourn this past year? Was I able to feel God's comforting presence in my life?*
- *Do I know anyone who is mourning? How can I be a comforting presence for them and for others who are mourning? How compassionate am I when I see people in pain?*
- *Take a moment to pray for all those you know who are suffering.*

## Prayer

Jesus, by taking on flesh, you took on all of the worries, struggles, and sorrows of life. Help me to be filled with hope this Christmas so that even as I mourn and experience the mourning of others, I may always remember that one day we will experience true comfort.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.

# Day 4

## **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

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### **Reflection**

by Victoria Weekley

How radically different is it for us to even think about being meek, to put aside pride and our tendencies to have the loudest answer and allow others to go before us? Jesus first gives us the example of meekness or humility in His incarnation. His birth showcases not an ounce of superiority or vanity but a perfect humbleness, a life lived like no other before or after. His life in ministry invites others to service despite the challenges that may arise, following with hopeful hearts, and to trust entirely in a loving God.

The meekness of Jesus is an arrow of love through our lives; He connects us, this living person of charity points us directly to the Father. His total trust in His Father makes it possible for us to see the fruits of imitating Him, but it was only because He decided it would be His Father first that He could trust and hope as He did.

Jesus' life reminds us we don't need everything to be at our hands but instead, an everlasting hope, a heart that is tender and open to people, to their faults and ours, a gentleness that invites the outsiders in and to be small so the Lord can be big. More of Him, less of us.

**Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness.**

### **Examination of Conscience**

- *What are some areas where I struggle with humility? Do I experience self-centered pride in my work, my gifts and talents, or my coursework?*
- *Do I approach difficult situations or conflicts with gentleness? Do I evangelize from a place of love and understanding?*
- *What is one practical step I can take to become humbler?*

### **Prayer**

Jesus, the world expected the Messiah to come as a powerful king with a large army and to take back Israel by force, but the true King, the Son of God, chose to come as a baby. Help me to imitate the gentleness and love of God in my interactions with everyone I encounter.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.

# Day 5

## **Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.**

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### **Reflection**

by Amy Marinaro

When Jesus talks about righteousness, He does not say blessed are those who “seek” or “desire” righteousness. He uses the words “hunger and thirst.” Satisfying our physical hunger and thirst is a basic need essential for our survival. By using this language, Jesus is challenging us to have the same essential need when it comes to being righteous and promoting righteousness in our world.

In another word, Jesus is inviting us to make this Beatitude incarnational. Righteousness is not meant to be a lofty, spiritual idea. Righteousness is in the flesh; it is to be lived. It is choosing to serve the person in front of each of us and to seek those on the peripheries. By taking on flesh, God made all of these ordinary moments of service sacred. This can look like helping a young person with schoolwork, advocating for laws that promote the disenfranchised, holding a door open, or texting “I’m praying for you. Let me know how I can help” to someone who is struggling. Most importantly it is addressing the needs of those who are most vulnerable: the poor and the at-risk.

It is only in choosing these actions every day that Jesus promises us the grace of true satisfaction.  
**Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is holiness.**

### **Examination of Conscience**

- *What are the needs of my family or community? When was the last time I recognized the face of Jesus in those I served? Was I able to pause and appreciate this recognition?*
- *Do I seek satisfaction in doing things my way, or do I bring my tasks to prayer to seek God’s way? Is there a way that I can become more involved in serving those around me?*

### **Prayer**

Jesus, through You the laws of old came to fulfillment in the new law of love. Help me to embody this love in every moment of every day, just as you embodied it in the manger in Bethlehem.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.

# Day 6

**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.**

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## Reflection

by Victoria Weekley

God knows us so well; He knows that this one will be difficult. One that will challenge us every day and usually a few times a day. But He sent us His son, to show us the perfect picture of forgiveness, of loving those that hate, frustrate, don't understand us. Jesus helps us see that every person is worth forgiving and understanding because their dignity and worth do not come from us but from the Father who loves and forgives unconditionally.

Through mercy, we also grow in understanding in one another. To forgive, we must listen; we must see that just like any one of us, they are struggling but trying. The mercy that is freely given to us every moment of the day from God our Father must also teach us we are not meant to hold on to it but share it. If you were the judge of your own life, wouldn't it be better if you were superabundantly merciful and understanding rather than not at all or always withholding? May we learn to look at each other with the same mercy our Father looks at us with. **Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness.**

## Examination of Conscience

- *When was the last time I was given the opportunity to be merciful? Did I show mercy? Why or why not?*
- *When was the last time I experienced the mercy of God? At Mass, in Reconciliation, in receiving or giving forgiveness to another? Did I take an opportunity to truly appreciate God's mercy?*

## Prayer

Jesus, the Father showed His infinite mercy through You – You who accepted a humble birth and a humiliating death in order to bring salvation to sinners. Help me to be a sign of Your mercy in the world.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.



# Day 7

## **Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.**

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### **Reflection**

by Julia St. Clair

God gave us all wonderful gifts and talents. One thing we all have but might not realize is being pure of heart. We can use our talents and passions to take us far in this life when we use them together with our vocation. Moreover, when we put our hearts and souls in all that we do, the results are incredible. Even when things don't always go our way, what matters most is that we gave it our all—and God both sees that and knows that. When we discern God's call, we also use the tools He gives us. This also helps us to see the good in our brothers and sisters and in every situation. That is why we must remain pure of heart and give our all in everything we do. During this Christmas season, let us be like Mary when she said "yes!" to the Lord's call. When we are pure of heart, we see God in everything we do and in everyone we encounter. He always makes Himself known, and we rejoice in seeing Him.

**Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.**

### **Examination of Conscience**

- *When was a time that I did the right thing for the wrong reason? How did I rectify the situation? Did I take ownership, apologize, or go to Reconciliation?*
- *What can I do to keep my intentions accountable when I go about my day? Can I talk to a spiritual director or friend, or check in with God?*
- *Our eyes and ears are the windows to my soul, are the things that I am watching or listening to filling my soul with good things? What steps can I take to do better?*

### **Prayer**

Jesus, You provided the perfect example of a pure Heart. Help me to love as You loved, not only in doing the right things, but in doing them for the right reasons, in order to give glory and praise to God.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.

# Day 8

## **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

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### **Reflection**

by Amy Marinaro

The promise of this Beatitude is profound. By being peacemakers, we will be acknowledged as children of God – by others and by God Himself. Each of the Beatitudes portrays a different characteristic of Jesus that we should strive for, but it is in pursuing peace that we truly take on the adoption that was earned for us through Jesus' Incarnation and the Paschal mystery. This is the level of importance that God places on peace.

How often do we sow discord in our relationships with God through choosing sin, in our own hearts through negative self-talk, in our communities and families through arguments and disagreements, and in our world by taking polarizing views that do not recognize "the other" as a person? Yet, we are called to so much more. By seeking peace in each of these areas, we truly accept that we are children of God and become the face of the Incarnated Jesus for others.

**Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness.**

### **Examination of Conscience**

- *How often do I take a moment to breathe and collect my thoughts when I want to argue with someone? Am I always successful in regaining composure?*
- *How can I bring God into moments of disagreement in my family or community?*
- *What would it look like for me to be a peacemaker?*

### **Prayer**

Jesus, You are the Prince of Peace. Help me to use this time of Advent and Christmas to become a person of peace who is a calming presence during the busy-ness of the season.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.

# Day 9

## **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

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### **Reflection**

by Fr. Steve DeMaio, SDB

The last of the beatitudes brings home the reality that the road to holiness is not for the faint of heart. It will be difficult. There will be those who don't understand the choices you make, who will criticize and ridicule the life you desire to live. Jesus assures us that there will be pain and that there is no other way to the fullness of life than through the cross. True love requires sacrifice and sacrifice is painful. Tomorrow we celebrate the birth of our Savior and our King who will eventually promise to never leave us on this journey, that he will be with us always. In his birth, Jesus begins to show us the way to holiness and by his own free choice will pass through the pain of persecution and the darkness of death in order to offer the fullness of life to each of us. Our God became man and dwelt among us. May we never be afraid to stand by him, even in the face of persecution.

**Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness.**

### **Examination of Conscience**

- *How do I act when others have differing views? Do I ever make others feel ostracized?*
- *How do I react when others criticize the path God has called me to live?*
- *Do I have the courage to speak about my faith with others? What practical steps can I take to learn more about my faith and become a better witness of God's love?*

### **Prayer**

Jesus, You promise me the kingdom of Heaven. Help me to continue on my journey of faith as I hope in the fulfillment of this promise. May this upcoming season of Christmas lead me to grow in holiness so that I may be ready for your Coming.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. St. John Bosco, pray for us.