



# COVENANT NEWS

BUKÁS-LOÓB SA DIYÓS COVENANT COMMUNITY • ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

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## NEWS

### Pope at audience:

#### “This Christmas, Open Up Your Heart”

Tells Faithful about Joy of Christmas

DECEMBER 14, 2016 / DEBORAH CASTELLANO LUBOV / POPE & HOLY SEE

This Christmas, open up your heart.

Pope Francis gave this encouragement during this morning’s General Audience in the Vatican’s Paul VI Hall, as he continued his new series of catecheses on Christian hope.

Reminding those present that we are approaching Christmas, he noted how the prophet Isaiah can help us again to open ourselves up to the hope of the Good News of the coming of salvation.

Francis used the reading to illustrate how God never abandons His people, and Whose grace surpasses all and any sin.

“I will pose the question: who is greater, God or sin? God! And who wins in the end? God or sin? God,” Francis stressed, saying, God’s love has the power to conquer the biggest, most terrible sin.

“The most beautiful of Christmas joys,” Francis went on to say, “is the joy of inner peace: ‘the Lord has blotted out my sins, the Lord has forgiven me, the Lord has had mercy on me, he came to my rescue.’”

“This is the joy of Christmas!” he said.

#### Reasons for Hope

“When everything seems to be over, when, in front of so many negative realities, faith becomes tiring and is tempted to say that nothing else makes sense, here was the good news.”

God, the Argentine Pontiff added, is coming to do something new. While he comes to establish a kingdom of peace, and bring freedom and consolation, we must realize evil will not triumph forever, he noted.

Since “the desperation is conquered, for God is with us,” the Pope observed, “we are also urged “to wake up a bit”  
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## COUNSELS

### Emmanuel.. At All Times!

THEME: We rejoice in the coming of Christ as we obey and trust God’s will.

WORD : Is 7:10-14 ~ Ps 24:1-2,3-4,5-6  
Rom 1:1-7 ~ Mt 1:18:24

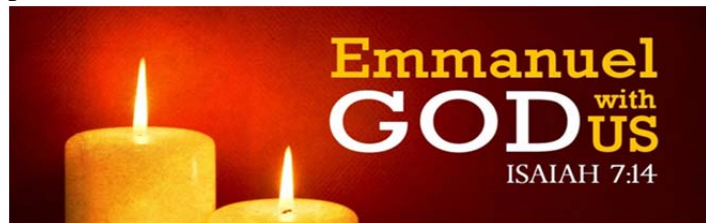
ORDER: *“Fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.’”*

(Mt 1:22-23)

REFLECTION:

The readings for the 4th Sunday of Advent begin with the story of King Ahaz who, in refusing to ask for a sign from God, was more willing to trust the Assyrians, than he was to believe that the Lord would save his country. As we enter into this final week of Advent, we might pay attention to our own resistance to ask for a sign from God or to believe in the God Who comes. Is it because we can’t see God? Do we not want to be disappointed? Might we believe that Christmas is only for children and not for intelligent, rational adults?

The Lord gives him a sign anyway with the promise of a child called:



His promise to be present with us is not dependent on our faith or lack of it, not dependent on our welcome of God or our resistance. God seems to long to be present with us, and is indeed. ...Continued on page 3

#### *Promise of the Week*

*He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, a reward from God, His Savior. (cf Ps 24:5)*

## On Being Catholic

*“But doesn’t a fancier car, get me just as far?”*

*– from a poem I had written in 2011*

Back in February, the company I work for gave me a pleasant surprise in my paycheck. Coincidentally, back then, I was about to mail the final payment on the car I still owed money on. So although we didn’t really need it, I started looking for a new car (in my defense for wanting a new one, we have four licensed drivers in our household, and at that time, had, just our three old Japanese imports to drive around in).

Then another coincidence happened. In browsing through yahoo car listings, one of them caught my eye... a black Mercedes with low miles that seemed favorably mis-priced. A few days later, my wife and I were driving down the highway in our new/old “Chedeng” (aka – “BENZ” / aka - our 2011 Mercedes Benz).

So it has been more than nine months now, and we’ve been happy with the fancier wheels. But of course that line from that poem I wrote back when I turned fifty, still sits hauntingly in my mind, because when I’ve had to use any of my other, aging Japanese cars, they still do get me just as far.

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### *Nostra Aetate*

DECLARATION ON  
THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS  
*NOSTRA AETATE*  
PROCLAIMED BY HIS HOLINESS  
POPE PAUL VI  
ON OCTOBER 28, 1965

I haven’t read *Nostra Aetate*, but its message was summed up for me in a parish Bible class by a Theology Professor from Seton Hall. His simplified paraphrase is that not only Catholics will make it to heaven. He had elaborated a little... that even Jews, and others who are non-believers in Jesus Christ, by being good people in the practice of their religions, will still find rays of Truth that enlighten all men.

I know, this would shock many staunch Catholics (I can just imagine their expressions of disbelief: “non-Catholics will be there in God’s Kingdom?!#\$\$?!”), but if you look through Vatican II’s documents, yup, *Nostra Aetate* is in there.

I happen to agree with



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## **A Boy, Consecrated to God**

# SAMSON

is one of the more recognizable figures in the Old Testament.

Before Israel was ruled by kings, it was led by Judges, and Samson was one of them. Scriptures mentioned his father as Manoah, but oddly, does not name his mother. He is often paralleled with John the Baptist in the New Testament, because both Samson and John’s Mother (Elizabeth) were described as barren and had conceived them at an older age. But the similarity ends there.

We know that John the Baptist, a precursor for Christ, was a righteous person. On the other hand, Samson was not your typical biblical hero, nor was he really a model for us Christians to follow. He lived his life in pursuit of fleshly pleasures. He cared too little for his parents, for his calling to serve God and his people, and kind of wasted his divinely-given gifts. He used the gifts for his own selfish interests and personal glory. For a lack of a better word, he had a flawed character. And yet God chose him and remained faithful to him.

The Philistines through the deception of Delilah were able to gouge his eyes and Samson lost his physical eyesight. Yet it was in the ensuing darkness, that he regained and saw the light of the Lord. While he was physically blind, he could clearly see his path; then, through his weakness, he regained his strength. He couldn’t rely anymore on his own self, but saw that he had to pray and call on the Lord, for he realized that his strength was not his own, but was from God.

As I reflect on these scriptural passages on the life of Samson, I can’t help but compare his life to mine before I found the Lord. Samson’s lifestyle and his personality seemed to mirror my own. We had been given spiritual gifts through baptism and we squandered them in pursuit of worldly things. We deviated from God’s plan and pursued our own purposes. My way of life was eerily similar to Samson’s. In the end, Samson gave up his life to regain it back; and so, I pray, have I.

Each one of us has been given spiritual gifts. Do we recognize these blessings? Are we willing to use these gifts for God’s purpose? May we slow down, ponder and reflect about this, especially during this Advent season.

## On Being Catholic....

(from page 2)

Now, about *Nostra Aetate* and that **Mercedes Benz**:

On the drive to work one morning, for some reason, my mind was thinking about *Nostra Aetate*, and that line from my poem from long ago came haunting me once more. Then suddenly, the two ideas merged into this one awesome thought. And I was soon, suddenly, happily laughing because of God's sense of humor (cause I know I couldn't have put those two together, even if I tried).

"How did the two disconnected things combine?" - you might ask... Well here's the message I suspect Him of silently whispering in my ear:

The thought was that being Catholic is like riding around in a luxury car.

Let me explain:

- \* Yup, a Toyota and a Mercedes will get me just as far; and I'd still be able to get to the same destination regardless of my car.
- \* People of other religions will also get to heaven (see discussion on *Nostra Aetate*). It's the same place that someday, I really want to get to.
- \* But being Catholic means that if/when I get to heaven
  - "if/when" cause just like with that car thing, and, for that matter, any road trip I go on, I'm never 100% sure of reaching my destination until I actually get there
- \* Then just as it is when I'm riding around in my Mercedes... then maybe, if/when I get to heaven...

...as a Catholic...



➡ I'd be arriving in style...

## **COUNSELS**

(from page 1)

In the letter to the Romans, Paul reminds all the beloved of God in Rome that they are called to be holy. We, too, beloved of God, are called to be holy. And, what is holiness? It is not about 'doing' but about 'being.' It's not about achievement or accomplishment, it's about our very identity. To be holy is to be defined by our relationship with God, to recognize and claim that we are indeed beloved of God. In this season of Advent, we await the birth of Christ. However, we can be certain too that God waits and watches us to see and to notice His presence and His love for us. Those who know such a loving presence are holy.

Matthew's account of "*this is how the birth of Jesus came about. . .*" may invite us to reflect on *how is God born in me?* We are given pause to reflect on our need to be saved. In what situations, have we found ourselves, in need of a Savior? We read in the news amazing saving actions of passers-by who save people from burning houses, dive into water to save someone from drowning, pull people away from being hit by oncoming cars. And for ourselves, do we need to be beneficiaries of such heroism too? To some extent, seems that it's not until we have an experienced need for God that we can believe, truly believe, in Jesus the Christ.

When Joseph found that Mary was with child before they lived together, he decided to divorce her privately. But the angel of the Lord appeared to him. He is told not to fear because the Child will be the savior of His people. Joseph obeys and accepts the role of father and as Mary's chaste spouse. This is to fulfill his mission. Like Joseph, we are also called for a specific vocation from God.

This is the time of the year to reflect on our own response to God's invitation to obey Him, no matter how difficult it might be. Joseph's obedience to God's will shows that in every decision-making, as long as we invoke divine assistance and guidance, there is always a grace that comes from ABOVE.



Our responsibility is to open our hearts and minds to God's ever-guiding Spirit. The spirit and joy of Christmas come to those who trust and obey God's will.

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**“This Christmas, Open Up Your Heart”** (from page 1)  
and “become men and women of hope.”

“How bad when we find a Christian who has lost hope! “But I do not hope anything, everything is over for me”: so says a Christian who is not able to look at horizons of hope and in front of his heart only a wall.”

“But God destroys these walls with forgiveness!” he continued. “And for this we must pray that God will give us every day and give hope to all, the hope that comes when we see God in the manger in Bethlehem.”

**Urgent**

The message of the Good News entrusted to us, the Pontiff exclaimed, is “urgent,” as the world cannot wait for justice, truth, and peace.

“And seeing the little Child of Bethlehem, the little ones of the world will know that the promise was fulfilled,” Pope Francis concluded, “the message has come true.”

“In a newborn baby, in need of everything, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, found inside is all the power of the God who saves.”

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On December 17, Pope Francis is going to celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Anyone who wishes to send good wishes to the Pontiff can do so through e-mail at the following addresses:

- Papafranciscus80@vatican.va (Latin)*
- PapaFrancesco80@vatican.va (Italian)*
- PapaFrancisco80@vatican.va (Spanish/Portuguese)*
- PopeFrancis80@vatican.va (English)*
- PapeFrancois80@vatican.va (French);*
- PapstFranziskus80@vatican.va (German)*
- PapiezFranciszek80@vatican.va (Polish)*

Created on social media for the occasion is the hashtag **Pontifex80**. source: [zenit.org](http://zenit.org)

**COUNSELS** (from page 3)

Prayer:

My dearest Lord God, help me to realize that this season of Advent is all about you. I pray that you will help me to always be faithful and holy. I open myself to your will in my life. I place my complete trust in you knowing that you know what is best for me. Guide me Jesus in choosing what is always right and pleasing to your name. For as what your name “Emmanuel” implies, you are God with us at all times. Thank you Father for sending your beloved son Jesus. May we continue to cling to the reason for the season, Jesus Christ our Lord is born. Amen.

**Direction:** Receive the grace of apostleship.

*Please note that a pdf of this Covenant News is also available online at [BLDNEWARK.com](http://BLDNEWARK.com)*

**LORD'S PROVISION**  
**PREVIOUS WEEK'S**

Collections:	Prior Week	YTD
Tithes & Love Offerings	\$ 2,240	\$ 130,283
Mission Collections	\$ 193	\$ 7,354

Financial details are available to all members through [treasury@bldnewark.com](mailto:treasury@bldnewark.com)

Thank you for your continued support!

**COMMUNITY CALENDAR**

**YLSS Salubungan - Friday, January 6, 2017**



**Medical Mission**

**February 13-16, 2017**

**Maasin, Leyte, Philippines**

**Contact Persons: Ramon/Leonie Mariazeta**  
[rmariazeta@msn.com](mailto:rmariazeta@msn.com) / [lmariazeta@msn.com](mailto:lmariazeta@msn.com)

Symbolon Study at Divine Mercy Parish  
*The Catholic Faith Explained*

Monday nights – Jan 9 – Mar 13, 2017, from 7-9pm  
Student booklet is \$25 / Contacts: Ray & Suzie Atienza  
(908-463-0449) / Registration deadline is **Jan 2, 2017**

Marshaling	Schedule	Date	Apostolate
		Dec 23	Evangelization
		Dec 30	Formation
		Jan 6	Management
		Jan 13	Mission

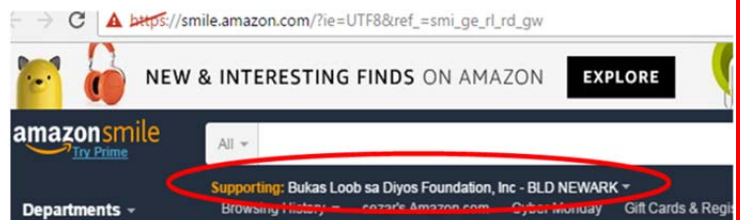
**OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

**IF YOU ARE GOING TO SHOP ANYWAY...**

**Shop at AmazonSmile**  
and Amazon will make a donation to:

**BLD-BUKAS LOOB SA DIYOS**

The holiday shopping season is upon us, and now is the perfect time to additionally support our community by shopping through AmazonSmile at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com). Each time a purchase is made, Amazon will give a portion to your favorite charity, which you need to include in your registration; just select Bukas Loob sa Diyos Foundation, Inc - BLD Newark:



We thank you for your cooperation and hope that you are able to further contribute to the vision and mission of the community through this effort.