4th Sunday of Advent (2013)

Theme:  **Challenges before the Saviour’s Birth**

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14/ Romans 1:1-7 / Matthew 1:18-24

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

***The greatest news ever is that God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son for our salvation (Jn. 3:16)! The birth of our Saviour by the Blessed Virgin Mary (gospel reading), which we celebrate at Christmas with great joy, was however not without challenges. So beloved,*** ***whatever challenges we may experience now or in the future should be borne with great faith in the Lord, with whom nothing is impossible, and with the great hope that smiles will follow our storms***.

***The first challenge***: how can the Divine and sinless Son of God become human in the womb of the young virgin called Mary without being affected by original sin? To remain sinless, the conception of Jesus had to occur without the normal contribution of the spouse of Mary. The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and she conceived by a unique divine miracle; but this created another problem.

***Second challenge***: Imagine a very good Christian young man and woman preparing for Holy Matrimony. They had promised to remain faithful to each other for life and to desist from pre-marital sex. Then, two months to the scheduled date of the wedding the lady (in distress) informs the groom-to-be (who had had no relations with her) that she has conceived. Probably the first thought that comes to the young man is that his lady had cheated on him; and so the wedding should be called off. St. Joseph and Mother Mary had a similar challenge.

***Third challenge***: Conflict between the law and fear of God. The Law of Moses required that the one who commits adultery should be stoned to death (Dt. 22:20-24). On the other hand, despite his suspicion of the expectant Mother Mary, Joseph was a just man – a God-fearing man – who loved his spouse dearly. Yet if what he suspected was true then he could not live with a spouse who had not been faithful; and so he decided to divorce her quietly; but then this would raise eyebrows in the village.

***Fourth challenge***: Consequence of a possible divorce. Yes, Mother Mary trusted the message of Angel Gabriel that: ‘Hail … the Lord is with you! … With God nothing is impossible’ (Lk. 1:28, 37), yet she had to deal with the possibility of being divorced, and the consequence of being stoned. God had to intervene, otherwise the imaginable would have happened: losing the Saviour even before His birth. St. Joseph was sent a message through a dream (gospel reading).

***Fifth challenge***: Should the message of the dream be trusted? Mother Mary had the benefit of receiving her message directly from the angel. St. Joseph, however, did not have that privilege; his message came through a dream. Should he believe the message or take it as coming from an obsession of a young lady he loved so much? Yes Joseph loved Mother Mary a lot, but what aided him the more to take the right decision was his God-fearing faith: he eventually believed that Mother Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Other challenges: there were other challenges (e.g. the arduous journey with the expectant Mother Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and the fact that they found no room there).

***Great news!*** Despite all the challenges, the great news (which has been repeated countless times in the past 2000 years) is that the birth of our Saviour took place; and this was so because the Divine interventions were more powerful than all the challenges: truly with God nothing is impossible! Beloved, I pray that whatever challenge you may be experiencing – whether in marriage, family, business, studies, health, or faith – you will overcome it by the intervention of ***God-with-us*** (Emmanuel: Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:23)! Amen!