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NATIVITY OF OUR LADY

SOLEMN PROFESSION

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, September 8th, 2026)

Qui me invenerit inveniet vitam.
He that shall find me, shall find life.
(*Prov 8:35*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,
and most especially you, who are going
to take your solemn vows of religion,

THE VERY SECLUDED world of mathematicians has been shaken. Artificial intelligence has just solved or made decisive progress on ten major mathematical problems that some scientists had been working on for a long time. Jacob Tsimerman, winner of the Fields Medal (the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for mathematics), observes:

If things continue this way, we will very soon reach a point where artificial intelligence systems will be significantly better than humans at what mathematicians are currently doing.

Should we be amazed by this? A professor is concerned:

[These advances] could have the unintended negative effect of eliminating any interest in continuing to work on the problem,

since it is now ‘solved’, even if no one is able to understand the solution.

Do we still need mathematicians if their research is limited to observing that their science is progressing, without knowing why? Here we are, then, at the heart of a mystery, a mystery to ponder upon.

To observe without understanding. This question refers to the creation of the universe *ex nihilo*—‘from nothing’, as theologians say. Perhaps from nothing, but not ‘without nothing,’ for God presides over this creation. He is its Author. This *ex nihilo*, a torment for the unbeliever, remains a mystery for the believer. Between the first instant of the universe’s life and the ‘nothingness’ that precedes it, the scientist would like to be able to establish an ‘equal’ sign, to find a conservation, to appeal to justice. There, the believer sees only the work of pure mercy, of great love.

The Book of Proverbs has just mentioned the Wisdom of God at work in creation:

When He prepared the heavens, I was present: when with a certain law, and compass, He enclosed the depths: when He established the sky above, and poised the fountains of waters: when He compassed the sea with its bounds, and set a law to the waters that they should not pass their limits.

When He balanced the foundations of the earth, I was with Him forming all things, and was delighted every day, playing before Him at all times, playing in the world; and my delights were to be with the children of men.^a

a. *Prov* 8:27-31.

God doesn’t need the universe. God doesn’t need man. And yet, He creates the universe. He moulds man in His image, and calls him to journey towards Him, to play with Him, and this ceaseless call resonates until this morning, reaching each of us.

Man’s nobility lies in the fact that God addresses us as beggars of love. Man’s greatness resides in the free response he gives to this call. “Two loves have created two cities,” wrote St. Augustine. “The love of self, even to the contempt for God. The love of God, even to the contempt for self.”^b The exercise of human freedom can lead to contempt for both God and

b. *City of God*,
bk. XIV, ch. 28.

neighbour, to confiscating the neighbour's freedom on their path towards God, and to trampling God's rights over every creature.

The Gospel reading for this Mass presents the genealogy of St. Joseph, with the following conclusion:

And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ.^c

c. Mt 1:16.

This is not the place to comment on this long list of three times fourteen generations. Let us first note that the person of Jesus is linked to the ancestors of Joseph, His father according to the law. A vocation is born in a family, the crucible where a heart is formed. Let us give thanks for so many Christian families, for those families in which so many vocations to the priesthood, to religious life, marriage, or celibacy have been, are being, and will be born. Furthermore, let us acknowledge that the lives of Christ's ancestors were sometimes deeply scarred by sin, by scandalous sins, to the point that the trace of God in them seemed to be lost, and that those who would follow Him wandered in doubt.

Yet, God is not overcome by evil. He triumphs over evil through the greatest act of love: giving one's life for one's friends. Mary, who concludes the genealogy without belonging to it, opens the way to a dazzling renewal, the awaited Messiah, the Saviour, Emmanuel, God with us. The Church celebrates today a birth: a birth in anticipation of another birth, a birth for a rebirth, that of all mankind.

The Gospels say nothing of Mary's birth, nor of the parents of she who was to be called to become the Mother of God. Apocryphal texts tell us the names of her parents: Joachim and Anne. Both were said to be from the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David. Anne was barren. Mary was thus born as an unexpected gift from God, a gift of His providence, of His mercy. From death comes life; from the closed womb, a child.

Today God's call resounds once again in our hearts. Every act of charity is a place of rebirth. The call also resounds particularly in your heart, as you prepare to pronounce your solemn vows in the monastic profession.

What is your program? Mother Cécile Bruyère, first abbess of Solesmes, thus spoke to her daughters:

On the day of our profession, we give to God the entire casket; then, as God draws out an object, we sometimes say, “I didn’t think I put that in there.” The Lord might reply, “Didn’t you give everything?” A strong soul restrains itself and thinks: with such a great Lord, there is no need to be stingy. Souls who complain and try to take back the object, to regain possession of their belongings, endure genuine discomfort. Since the Lord is loyal, why not be loyal to Him? On the day of our profession, we give the casket, and on a day of renewal, we see what it contains; it has been given, there is no going back, but we must tell ourselves that everything must be begun anew...

Earthly life is the terrain of renewal, the place where nothing is stable or certain. It is sometimes tiring, but we must not see only the disadvantages of this state; this is very useful for sinners like us, it is also very joyful: if nothing is definitive, neither are our sins. If until now we have not given ourselves completely, we are happy to be able to say: ... I can now be faithful.^d

*d. Conference,
October 26th, 1897.*

With Mary, you are born again today. Grow with her until the day of the eternal wedding. Keep being a watchman, seeking the Lord and His day, as Wisdom invites us to do:

Now, therefore, ye children, hear Me: blessed are they that keep My ways. [...] Blessed is the man that heareth Me, and that watcheth daily at My gates, and waiteth at the posts of My doors. He that shall find Me, shall find life.^e

e. Prov 8:32-34-35.

Amen.

