

“Hail and blessed be the hour and the moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold. In that hour, I beseech Thee, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires through the merits of our Savior, Jesus Christ, of His Blessed Mother and of St. Joseph. Amen.”

This novena prayer dates back about 100 years and begins on the Feast of St. Andrew, November 30th. It is said for 25 days until Christmas Eve night when Jesus was born in a stable. It is good to say the prayer several times a day (the novena specifies 15 times) to enter into the spirit and meaning of that holy night. I have added: “...and of St. Joseph” because last year we finished out the ***Year of St. Joseph*** on December 8th. We often neglect the powerful and intercessory role of St. Joseph rounding out the life of the Holy Family.

This prayer can help ground us in the true meaning of that first Christmas. The Son of God left the glories of heaven to become Incarnate within the womb of the Virgin Mary. Her flesh became His Flesh. Her blood became His Blood. Her heart became one with His Heart. The Heart of the Son of God began to beat in this world as the human Heart of Jesus. Then the holiest of moments came—the birth of our Savior. It was a night of ***POVERTY, HUMILITY, SIMPLICITY AND LOVE.***

Too often we romanticize that holy night with our nativity displays tucked amidst the decorated trees, presents, baked cookies, cards, lights, parties, holiday music and endless

activities. All of that is good (in moderation) if we haven't forgotten the true meaning of what that night is all about; God was born and placed in the wood of a manger to give us His Heart. And the risen Lord is born daily and placed on the wood of the altar to continue to give us His Heart. Jesus was born in utter *POVERTY* with only one thing to give us—His Heart of Love. The risen Lord is born in *HUMILITY* and *SIMPLICITY* in a tiny Host to give us all that He has—His Heart of Love.

The animals were the first to experience the warmth of their Maker's Love. They were not preoccupied with the cares of the world; and so, the cow and the donkey were privileged to witness His humble birth. Next, the shepherds came, being sent by the angels, to encounter the Child that would warm their simple, uncomplicated hearts and lives. How about you? Where do you stand? What is in your heart?

The retail stores are full of merchandise. The grocery stores are full of an assortment of food to buy. The world hurries upon its way, crowding stores to buy and to visit friends with good cheer. Yet another Christ+Mass goes unnoticed—each day—each hour. The crowds grow thin. The coldness of the Tabernacle is His lonely *crib for a bed*. Are we lost in our thoughts or do we marvel in Him? He is not just a plastic baby placed in a manger. *HE IS EMMANUEL: ALIVE AND CALLING OUT TO EACH ONE OF US!* Is there *room for him in your Inn?*

May Advent prepare your heart to hunger for His Love as you are nourished on *Living Bread* from Bethlehem to the Altar!