

- Do you believe God?
- Mind you, I'm not asking whether you believe that there *is* a God, but rather that you believe what our Lord has revealed about Himself. Do you take our Lord commands seriously?
- Throughout the course of Advent, the liturgy prepares us for the coming of Our Lord. In the beginning of Advent we are reminded over and over again that the Lord will come in power and glory at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.
- As Christmas approaches, we hear the ancient prophecies of old, foretelling the coming of the great Messiah, Who is to be born of a Virgin.
- Then, as we get into the Christmas Season, we see the full flowering of the Mystery of the Incarnation with the great feasts of Christmas, the Holy Family, Mary Mother of God, the Epiphany, and the Baptism of the Lord.
- The point of these feasts is not simply a retelling of familiar and quaint stories about the early life of our Lord. They're meant to strengthen our faith in the fact that God *really and truly* became man and dwelt among us. They tell us that God Is Who He says He Is!
- To further reinforce our faith, every Sunday and every solemnity, we pray aloud the *Creed*, in which we profess our faith in *one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible*.
- We profess our belief in *one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God... begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, through Whom all things were made*.
- Yet the very crux of the Creed is when we pray: *For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man*. So crucial are these words that, as we say them, we are to bow profoundly.
- The question, though, is this: do we really and truly believe what we profess in the *Creed*? And if we do, do we live our lives in a manner that proves it?
- Our readings today bring up the question of believing God and acting accordingly.
- In our first reading, we hear of the prophet Jonah calling the Ninevites to repentance. Scripture records for us that, at hearing Jonah's message, "the people of Ninevah believed God" – and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth as a sign of their repentance.
- In our Gospel we hear once again another version of the calling of the apostles. Whereas last Sunday we heard from John's Gospel, today we hear from Mark.
- After Jesus calls the people of Galilee to repent, reminding them that the Kingdom of God is at hand, He sees Simon and Andrew along the coast of the Sea of Galilee. And at Jesus' invitation, these rugged fisherman immediately abandon their nets and follow Him.
- The same thing happens with the other set of apostolic brothers, James and John: the men whom Jesus will call the "Sons of Thunder" just two chapters later in Mark's Gospel.
- At the call of Jesus, these impetuous and quick-to-anger men immediately drop their nets and leave their father behind.
- They didn't ask Him any questions. They simply believed and knew that they had to follow our Lord. And so convinced were they of this truth that they were willing to leave behind both family and livelihood.
- Again, these are not just nice stories from the life of Jesus meant only to edify us.
- In retelling these stories, the Church is challenging us to examine how we live out our faith in God: both in the fact that He exists, but more particularly in the fact that He loves us, and that He calls us to repent of our sins and follow Him – all because He desires our salvation.
- As we ponder these points, we must ask ourselves if we are living in a manner that proves that

we believe our Lord's own revelation and are earnestly following His call.

- Truly, do we believe not only that God became man and died for our sins to save us, but that He will come again at the end of time to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire? And does our manner of living reflect these beliefs?
- If we want to know how we are to live in a manner that proves that we believe what God has revealed about Himself, we need only look to the saints. Very beautifully, the Church celebrates today the feast day of one of her most ancient and beloved saints: St. Agnes.
- St. Agnes was born of a noble family in 291, and she died at the tender age of 12 or 13 in the Diocletian Persecution in 304, a virgin dedicated to Christ – a virgin who was willing to die at such a young age because she believed all that our Lord revealed about Himself.
- As with other virgin martyrs, Agnes had many suitors because of her wealth and beauty, and in refusing their hands in marriage, they turned her in to the authorities for being a Christian. Yet, even when faced with death, Agnes held steadfast in professing her Catholic Faith.
- St. Ambrose memorialized her death several decades later, commenting: “She stood still, she prayed, she offered her neck. You could see fear in the eyes of the executioner, as if he were the one condemned; his right hand trembled, his face grew pale as he saw the girl's peril, while she had no fear for herself.”
- St. Agnes was able to die this way because she knew God and was intimate with Him in prayer. Agnes understood that the good things of this world couldn't compare with God.
- She knew as well that her beauty and wealth were as nothing compared to the incomparable beauty and riches of knowing Christ intimately and following His call.
- So, while those around her thought she was throwing away her life recklessly before she even really had a chance to live it, in dying for our Lord, St. Agnes believed that she was simply walking down the aisle as a bride going to meet her Bridegroom.
- Because of her relationship with God, St. Agnes was perfectly prepared to give that supreme witness to the beautiful truths of our Catholic Faith. We should be the same way!
- Do you believe God? Do you believe all that He reveals about Himself through our Catholic Faith? If not, what keeps you from this? Have you done the hard work of learning your Catholic Faith as you should? Do you pray and have a real relationship with God?
- And if you do believe God and all that He has revealed about Himself: His omnipotence, His omniscience, the fact that He is our first beginning and our last end, that He loves us enough to become one of us and to die for our sins, and that we will all have to face Him some day to make an accounting of our sins, does your manner of life reflect those beliefs?
- We live in a time in which there's a terrible crisis of integrity amongst the Church's hierarchy.
- It used to be that we priests decried what we called “Cafeteria Catholicism” amongst the laity, i.e., that some Catholics would pick and choose which Church teachings they would choose to believe and follow, and which they would disregard.
- Today, it's become quite clear that many of the Church's own shepherds have taken on this same “cafeteria” mentality, and that many of the faithful are being led astray by them.
- Thus, my greatest concern is that you live your faith with integrity, that you believe God and His teachings – despite any contradictory or confusing stances from Church leaders.
- The truths of our Faith are unchanging, because they come from God Himself, and no shepherd can ever change them. It's really a proud thing to believe otherwise.
- May God give us all the grace to believe Him, the wisdom to obey the authentic and perennial teachings of His Church, and the courage to live our Catholic Faith with integrity.
- St. Agnes, pray for us.