

**Homily for the *Simbang Gabi* Christmas Novena
December 21, 2016**

**Saint Katherine Drexel Parish - Sacred Heart Church
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this Mass during the *Simbang Gabi* Novena in anticipation of the celebration of Christmas. We come to renew our desire to be close to Mary during these days, asking her to teach us how to prepare our hearts to welcome Christ more fully into our hearts.

Just a few weeks ago, our country commemorated the sobering anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Just a matter of hours after that attack, the Japanese invaded the Commonwealth of the Philippines. These two actions resulted in drawing both Americans and Filipinos into the Pacific Theatre of World War II. The years that would follow brought about massive destruction and a significant number of casualties.

In a Joint Address to Congress the following day, President Franklin Roosevelt spoke to the gravity of the situation that was being faced by our country, but he also expressed his confidence that the response of the country would be one that would result in an “inevitable triumph.”¹ While

there was no way that the president could guarantee that this victory would indeed happen, he had faith in the armed forces, the “unbounding determination” of the people, and God to bring about that triumph.² It was through faith in these pillars that the country moved forward, hoping that the promise of the president would be fulfilled.

As we near our annual celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, we call to mind another attack, followed by another promise of victory. That attack is, of course, the one leveled against our first parents, Adam and Eve. The devil tricked them into disobeying God, and as a result, they became separated from the Lord’s loving friendship. Just as the attack on Pearl Harbor was understood to be an attack on all Americans, the attack of Satan was an attack on all of humanity. We call this the inheritance of Original Sin, by which we are born being separated from friendship with God.

God did not delay in responding to this attack against the jewel of His creation. Rather, He addressed Satan by making the following promise: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; they will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel” (Genesis 3:15). Since this promise comes from God Himself, we

can read it as one that truly promises an “inevitable triumph” of life over death, of good over evil.

The Lord would continue to reveal how this promise would be brought about as the history of the people of Israel evolved. We have been hearing these prophecies throughout this Advent season, especially as we listen to the Prophet Isaiah. Although the road was rough and confusing at times, it was these promises that kept the chosen people focused on moving forward, eagerly awaiting that day when they would be freed from their slavery.

“In the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4), that promise would finally take on flesh. The Angel Gabriel visited Mary, the one human being born who was preserved beforehand from the stain of Original Sin, and announced to her that she would bear this Messiah for whom her people had been waiting. Her *fiat*, or ‘yes’ to God’s plan, opened the door for God to enter into the world in order to destroy the enemy by His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

In the Gospel that we just heard, we hear her cousin Elizabeth praise Mary with these words: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Luke 1:45). One of the

ways of looking at this verse is to see Elizabeth as a sort of prophet who praises Mary for believing not just the promises of the Angel that she would bear a Son in a wholly unique way, but also the promises of the Lord that He would send a Savior to bring about the ultimate victory for His chosen people. Mary's 'yes' to the will of God in her life was an expression of her belief that the promises made by the Lord from the moment of the Fall in the Garden of Eden would indeed be fulfilled.

When we celebrate Christmas, especially as we look at the newborn infant in the manger, we are reminded of those promises made by God for the coming of the Messiah. We are reminded that He sent His Son as the fulfillment of those promises so that all of humanity could be restored to friendship with Him in this life, and for eternity in Heaven.

We are also encouraged to renew our faith in the many additional promises that the Lord has made to us through the various Scripture passages of the New Testament. Sometimes we find ourselves falling into doubt or confusion as to whether those promises will actually be fulfilled or not. Whether it is something with which we struggle personally, or it is something happening in the world that seems to have no positive resolution, we can look to that innocent figure of the baby Jesus, seeing in

Him the truth that God makes good on His promises, for as we will hear from St. John on Christmas morning: “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5), and the darkness *will* not overcome it.

As we continue our celebration of this Eucharist, let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to assist us, that we might imitate her great faith in the certainty of God’s promises for us. While we continue to engage in the various battles that we wage against sin and evil in the world, we look to Christ who was born into this world to save us from Satan’s power, and who promises that we who remain united with Him in the midst of those struggles will be granted a share in His victory in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ President Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Transcript of Joint Address to Congress Leading to a Declaration of War Against Japan*, 8 December 1941, [https:// www.ourdocuments.gov/](https://www.ourdocuments.gov/).

² *ibid.*