

*Readings*

Is 7:10-14

Ps 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Rom 1:1-7

Mt 1:18-24

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We have heard these words so many times we may overlook the significance of what they mean. The birth of Jesus came about because of the cooperation of ordinary human beings. We know that Mary was an ordinary young girl - chosen to do extraordinary things - but she was still ordinary in the sense that she was of the usual stock and family and characteristics of her time. Joseph, too, was an ordinary, hard-working laborer, a well-respected member of the community but definitely an “ordinary Joe” of his day. Both were rather remarkable for their “unremarkableness.”

I’ve known a lot of ordinary Joes and Marys in my life. Beginning with family and friends, most of the people I’ve encountered have been rather unremarkable as far as doing outstanding things goes. But I’ve found as I look at the entirety of their lives that they have been inspirational for me. They have *become* heroes, inspirational and extraordinary because of the longevity of their loyalty, the depth and strength of their faith which has established a tradition. They have become legendary in their goodness because of the ease with which they do it as a way of life. As such they have become role-models for me.

What I have found so inspirational about these people is that they are *real* people, flesh-and-blood, honest-to-goodness ordinary Joes and Marys, and not plaster saints. I find that I want to be like them because of the good that they do and who they are - and because I *can* be like them. They are quite “imitatable”; their accomplishments are not beyond my abilities. And if I *can* be like them,

chances are I will *try* to do so. If something seems possible, people tend to keep trying.

My heroes and role models, therefore, are ordinary Joes and Marys:

- in the priesthood, especially my brothers in the Order of St. Augustine, dedicating themselves to serving the church;
- in parents who provide example for their children and give themselves selflessly for them in day-to-day situations;
- in children who are loyal to their parents when they can no longer take care of themselves;
- in spouses who stand by each other in daily situations, and in the trying times of sickness;
- in friends who are there for me as supports, as challenges, as instruments of the simple pleasures of conversation and companionship;
- in public and political figures who serve the community faithfully and tend to the mundane matters of ordinary events;
- and in the prophets who don't make the headlines, but challenge me and raise my consciousness because of how ordinarily they do what is right and don't compromise their values.

I can put names and faces on all these types of people who have become my role-models, and it is remarkable how ordinary they are. I'll bet that you have your own set of ordinary people who affect you in similar ways.

It was to this kind of person that God entrusted the plan of salvation. Ordinary people like Mary and Joseph were asked to cooperate with God's power. They were not forced to do so and they were not powerless pawns used by God. Their cooperation was required in order for this scenario to

unfold. Without Joseph and Mary, ordinary people of their time, this could not have happened as it did.

So this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: God called upon human beings to put their best foot forward and respond to the challenge of cooperating in the plan of salvation. It is to their credit that they did not see their ordinariness as a liability, but as the asset which it was, a gift to inspire others to use their ordinariness for the same purpose. *For the birth of Jesus Christ is still coming about* - and all of us ordinary Joes and Marys still have something to contribute to this unfolding plan. May we pay tribute to all those remarkably unremarkable people whose example inspires us to do good by continuing the ordinary tradition of making Jesus Christ come alive in all we do.