

**Homily**  
**Solemnity of Mary - B**

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
January 01, 2021

Nm 6: 22-27  
Ps 67: 2-3, 5, 6, 8  
Gal 4: 4-7  
Lk 2: 16-21

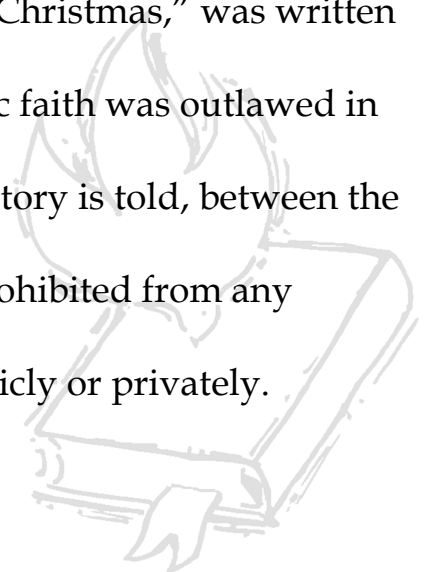
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*On the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...*

*Eight maids-a-milkin',  
Seven swans-a-swimmin',  
Six geese are layin',  
Five golden rings,  
Four calling birds,  
Three French hens,  
Two turtle doves,  
And a partridge in a pear tree.*

My dear brothers and sisters, may I introduce you to the Christmas Carol that I enjoy *the least*...

An old tradition, which is partly fact and partly fiction, tells us that the holiday tune entitled, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," was written in England in 1780, around the time the Catholic faith was outlawed in Great Britain by the royalty of the time. As the story is told, between the years 1558 to 1829, the Catholic faithful were prohibited from any practice of their faith by law, whether it be publicly or privately.



Catholic Englishmen were forced to teach their children about the ways of God somewhat covertly, in an attempt to skirt around the laws of the time.

As a result, folklore tells us that “The Twelve Days of Christmas” was written as a type of code to instruct the children of the time concerning the ways of faith. The code works something like this...

The True Love	=	God himself
“Me”	=	Every baptized person
Partridge in a Pear Tree	=	Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge which feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings, much in memory of the expression of Christ’s sadness over the fate of Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling!” (Lk 13: 34; Mt 23: 37)

Two Turtle Doves	=	The Old and New Testaments
Three French Hens	=	Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues
Four Calling Birds <sup>1</sup>	=	The Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists
Five Golden Rings <sup>2</sup>	=	The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the “Pentateuch”,

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1 Originally, the song referred to “colly birds,” which means blackbirds (colly referring to “coal dust”).

2 The “5 gold rings” (not “golden”) refer not to 5 rings made of gold, but to five

	which gives the history of man's fall from grace.
Six Geese a-Laying	= The six days of creation
Seven Swans a-Swimming	= The seven sacraments; the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and the Fear of the Lord)
Eight Maids a-Milking	= The eight beatitudes
Nine Ladies Dancing	= The nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control)
Ten Lords a-Laping	= The Ten Commandments
Eleven Pipers Piping	= The eleven faithful apostles
Twelve Drummers Drumming	= The twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

According to PNC Bank's 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Price Index, if you actually purchased a set of each item in 2018, the total cost of all these gifts from the "true love would equal" \$38,993.59, up \$67.56 from the total from 2018 and more than \$7,000 from 2012 (if you bought multiple

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ring-necked pheasants.

sets of these items, as presented in the song, the number would rise to hundreds of thousands of dollars).

Concerning today's homily about the Solemnity of Mary and the "maids a milkin," the bible doesn't really give much stock to the number *eight*. Biblical symbolism is great with the number seven (the number of perfection), six (the number of imperfection), three (completeness), twelve (the Church) and forty (a number of duration). But *eight*? The only significant place you can apply the number is to the number of beatitudes offered in Matthew 5 or this story of Jesus' circumcision. Otherwise, the number *eight* doesn't seem very important at first glance in the life of the Catholic faith.

That said, about 1600 years ago, a man named Cyril of Jerusalem *gave* this number a great significance in the Church, for Cyril saw this number as a symbol of completion to a cycle of events. For Cyril, the eighth day represents the end of an *octave*, a time of intense prayer and focus within the Church that centers on an important event. In our case, today is the eighth day of the octave of Christmas, the last day of intense focus on the Emmanuel presence in the world. For these last eight days,

the Church has asked of priests to focus on special prayers and devotions to highlight this octave, to make light of the deep significance this event brings to the world. So you may have noticed that there are special insertions made during the Eucharistic Prayers or the solemn blessings.

Cyril talks about another octave taking place during the week of Easter and Holy Week itself. Holy Week's octave is most important, for on the eighth day of that octave, Jesus rises from the dead. The eighth day for Jesus is a day of resurrection. The eighth day for us, our eighth day, focuses on our resurrection as well. Our goal in life is to rise with God, but to make it to this eighth day, we are called to devote our lives to intense prayer and love, to give ourselves completely for others as Christ has done for us.

Today's celebration marks the last day of the octave of Christmas, the eighth day, and the day of our Lord's circumcision in the temple. On this day, the name of the Lord is offered publicly: Jesus, which means "The Lord saves." We honor this day in our Church year as a time of completion, of recognizing our Lord as our Savior in the same way that

the shepherds recognized the Lord in Luke's gospel, in the same way that Joseph and his virgin wife recognized the Lord in their midst.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains to us why we recognize the Blessed Mother in such a special way this day as well. The Catechism states, "On New Year's Day, the octave day of Christmas, the Church celebrates... the divine and virginal motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary (as) a singular salvific event: for Our Lady it was the foretaste and cause of her extraordinary glory; for us it is a source of grace and salvation because 'through her we have received the Author of life'" (#115). The Catechism continues, "The solemnity of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, an eminently Marian feast, presents an excellent opportunity for liturgical piety to encounter popular piety: the first celebrates this event in a manner proper to it; the second, when duly catechized, lends joy and happiness to the various expressions of praise offered to Our Lady on the birth of her divine Son, to deepen our understanding of many prayers, beginning with that which says: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners'" (#115).

Thus, as we celebrate this eighth day, this last day of the Christmas Octave, let us become even more intense in our prayer in order to reflect on this gift of Emmanuel in our lives and to make God present in the lives of others. So that we may do this, I invite you to join me in prayer, offering a song that is very appropriate for this feast of Mary's Solemnity. I invite you to join me in the "Salve Regina," the song that priests and religious pray throughout the world as a sign of devotion to our Blessed Mother. This is, as always, our prayer today...

*Sing the "Salve Regina."*