

This morning's Gospel is the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. He starts with the genealogy of Jesus. Then Matthew tells of the birth of Jesus. Mary was engaged to Joseph, but she was pregnant. The law said that he had to divorce her. It would've been a public scandal for this young maiden who had grown up living in the Temple to become pregnant without being married. But Joseph, not wanting to cause a scandal, decided that he would divorce her quietly. An angel appeared to him in a dream and told him that the child within Mary was of the Holy Spirit. And then the angel told him that she was to have a son and Joseph was the name of Jesus or Yeshua or more commonly pronounced Joshua, meaning "the Lord saves".

There are many reasons for Matthew and Luke to list the genealogies of Jesus in their gospels. Chief among is the affirmation that Jesus, is truly the Son of God, as all the gospels testify. He has come "in the flesh" as a real human being. This assertion was critically important in the time of the apostles and the first Christian generations because, unlike today, the temptation of the early period of Christianity was not to deny Jesus' divinity, but to deny His real and authentic humanity.

The first Christian heretics were those who said that Jesus was some sort of divine being who only appeared to be a true man, but was not really one. They taught that "flesh and blood" was degrading if not downright evil. Thus the apostle Paul had to insist that in Jesus, who belongs to the Jews "according to the flesh" (Rom 9:5), the "whole fullness of deity dwells *bodily*" (Col 2:9), and that it is the same Jesus who died and was buried and raised in the flesh as a real man, who is Messiah and Lord.

The genealogies in the gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke are made to and from Joseph. This is not to give the impression that Joseph was the biological father of Jesus. Both gospels are absolutely clear on this point. Jesus is born from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The point is rather that Joseph is Jesus' father according to the law, and it is from the father that one's lawful descent is to be traced. Jesus' legal father is "Joseph, son of David," the legal husband of Mary (Mt 1:20).

One other important point is made in listing the human generations which led to the birth of Jesus. This is the fact that God is faithful to His promises even though His chosen people are often not faithful. Among the people from whom Jesus came are both sinners and heathens. In a word, Jesus comes not only from the righteous

and holy, but from the wicked and sinful. And He comes not only from Jews, but from Gentiles. The names of the four women specifically mentioned in St. Matthew's list-- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba the wife of Uriah -- were noted, or perhaps better to say notorious, Gentiles, including one of David's own wives, the mother of Solomon. The point to be seen here is one beautifully made in an early Christian hymn quoted in the Bible in the second letter to Timothy:

If we have died with Him,  
    we shall also live with Him;  
If we endure,  
    we shall also reign with Him;  
If we deny Him,  
    He also will deny us;  
If we are faithless,  
    He remains faithful-- for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim 2:11-13)

This is the wonderful witness of the genealogies of Jesus: If we are faithless, the Lord God remains faithful-- for he cannot deny Himself!

Everyone who has been baptized, if he is to obtain the eternal blessedness and salvation for which he hopes, should live free from all sin. Sts. Peter and Paul made this clear. Paul said of Christ, "In that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God", adding, "likewise we also ought to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God" (cf. Rom. 6:10-11).

Peter wrote, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath died for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: that you no longer should live the rest of your time by the lusts of men, but by the will of God" (cf I Pet. 4:1-2). If it was for our sake that the Lord lived His time on earth, to leave us an example, and He passed His life without sin, we too must live without sin, in imitation of Him. Since He said even to Abraham's descendants according to the flesh, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39), how much more will He say to us who have no physical kinship with Him, "If you were My children, you would do My works"? It is therefore consistent and just that anyone who, after divine baptism, after the covenants he made then to God and the grace he received from it, does not follow Christ's way of life step by step, but transgresses and offends against the benefactor, should be utterly deprived of divine adoption and the eternal inheritance.

But, O Christ our King, who can worthily extol the greatness of Your love for mankind? What was unnecessary for Him and what He did not do, namely, repentance (for He never needed to repent, being sinless, cf. Heb. 4:15) He granted to us as a mediator for when we sin even after receiving grace. Repentance means returning once again to Him and to a life according to His will out of remorse. Even if someone commits a deadly sin, if he turns away from it with all his soul, abstains from it and turns back to the Lord in deed and truth, he should take courage and be of good hope, for he shall not lose eternal life and salvation. When a child according to the flesh meets his death, he is not brought back to life by his father, but someone born of Christ, even though he fall into deadly sins, If he turns again and runs to the Father who raises the dead, is made alive once more, obtains divine adoption, and is not cast from the company of the just.

May we all attain to this, to the glory of Christ and of His Father without beginning and of the life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and unto unceasing ages. Amen