

# Infant Jesus Feast Day 2009

*“Devotions without Spirituality is Empty”*

*“Spirituality without Devotions is Cold & Inhuman”*

On Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2009, Sts Peter & Paul Church marked the feast day of the Infant Jesus with the Novena Adoration of the Divine Infant followed by a solemn Mass concelebrated by His Grace Bishop Paul Tan SJ (Bishop of Melaka-Johor) & the Discalced Carmelite Friars. Event was organized by the Society of the Infant Jesus.

Bishop Paul began his homily by emphasizing that all approved Catholic Devotions, no matter how good, must never be used as a substitute for the worship of God – Father, Son, & Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass. He immediately clarified that Devotions, however, play an important role in helping us aspire to God. Human beings do require physical signs, symbols, & ceremonies to help them relate to God; the Catholic Church is full of these riches including the Tabernacle, the Stations of the Cross, Processions, Statues, etc., he added. Novenas and other Catholic devotional practices are good examples of such outward ceremonies and signs that help to enhance one's spiritual journey towards God. He explained how he came to this realization himself:

Years ago, when Bishop Paul was a newly ordained priest, he was sent as a missionary to a poor and remote village in South America. He was full of apostolic zeal and all ready to implement the teachings of Vatican II.

On one occasion, he frowned upon a request from the villagers for him to lead the procession of Our Lady's statue from one church to another. His superior, without reprimanding him, asked him to reflect on this, “Paul, you are highly educated and have many different means to aspire to and to relate with God. For many of these poor and uneducated villagers, Devotions and other outward physical spiritual signs like processions could be their only means to connect with God.”

Bishop Paul (then Fr Paul) realized the prudence of this insight from his superior. He subsequently led the villagers in a candlelight procession of the Blessed Sacrament up a hill. Halfway up the hill, a man broke through the barricade of soldiers guarding the procession. He went towards Fr Paul who was holding the Monstrance; knelt down and made his confession. The outward spiritual signs of the Monstrance housing the Host, the candles carried by the multitude of villagers, and the procession itself somehow moved this man to repentance. Both Fr Paul & the penitent man were filled with tears following the confession. It was indeed an event that forever humbled Fr Paul's “pride” in belittling the graces that God can elicit from the devotional aspects of our Faith.

Bishop Paul stressed that all good devotions must lead one to closer spiritual union with God. To best explain this, he drew upon the words of Carmelite Provincial Delegate Fr Thomas Lim OCD in regard to devotions. Fr Thomas on many occasions has expressed that “Devotions without Spirituality is Empty”. To that deep insight, Bishop Paul added, “Spirituality without Devotions is also Cold and Inhuman”.

Many present at the Feast Day celebrations were deeply inspired by these seeds of wisdom and experienced an “epiphany” (realization) of the true meaning and purpose of devotions as evident during the conversations over the dinner & fellowship which followed the Mass. The Word indeed became Flesh and Dwelt amongst the people that evening!

**Article Contributed By Rodney Chua “Team Jesus” – Society of the Infant Jesus (Church of Sts Peter & Paul)**