

# And a Child Shall Lead Them: Devotion to the Child Jesus

*Devotion to Baby Jesus, ancient yet ever new, brings healing  
and hope to our troubled times.*

*by Maria Vitale Gallagher*



For many of us, our fascination with Jesus began with our first Christmases, when we saw a statue of the Son of God resting in a manger at our parish church. There was something so remarkable about God humbling Himself to come into the world just as we had, as a helpless Child completely dependent on His mother for care. We felt a kinship with Him, a feeling that He knew what it was like to be a child, to be small in a big and often frightening world. He was indeed our Savior, but He was also human, with a child's trust in God the Father. We could love Christ as a Brother and as a Friend, for He had stooped down to reach us in our humanity, even in our littleness.

Christmas seemed to us the ultimate birthday, a recognition of the most blessed event in history, the coming of the Lord.

**In a world torn  
apart by violence,  
even violence in  
the womb, the  
child in the manger  
offers hope—the  
Christmas story  
that never ends.**

*“And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary, His mother; and falling down they adored Him; and opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11)*

Our adoration of the Christ Child might have begun with our childhood Christmases, but it doesn't have to end there. Especially at this time of year, in the weeks following Christmas, devotion to the Infant Jesus is a time-honored tradition in the Church that can lead to a host of spiritual blessings.

## Saintly Devotion

Those of us who cultivate a devotion to the Child Jesus are in good company: the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph were His first devotees. Other saints associated with the baby Jesus are St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Faustina, St. Christopher, St. Rose of Lima, and St. Teresa of Avila, among others.

As St. Therese said about her vocation to the religious life:

“I had offered myself . . . to the Child Jesus as His *little plaything*. I told Him not to use me as a valuable toy children are content to look at but dare not touch, but to use me like a little ball of no value which He could throw on the ground, push with His foot, pierce, leave in a corner, or press to His heart if it pleased Him.”

Jack Wintz, O.F.M., notes the legend of St. Anthony of Padua who had a vision



of the child Jesus, which could account for the fact that his statues often depict him holding Jesus in his arms. But Fr. Wintz points out that there may be another explanation, namely that Anthony was a celebrated preacher of the Gospel, the Incarnate Word. In carrying Jesus, St. Anthony is cradling the Word made flesh. Since he shared Jesus with the world, it only makes sense that St. Anthony would be portrayed as having a special relationship with the Divine Redeemer.

The Child Jesus appeared to St. Faustina, who is known for her

## Novena to the Infant of Prague

O, Jesus, Who has said ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you, through the intercession of Mary, Thy Most Holy Mother, I knock, I seek and I ask that my prayer may be granted.

(Mention your intentions here.)

O Jesus, Who has said all that you ask of the Father in My Name, He will grant you, through the intercession of Mary, Thy Most Holy Mother, I humbly and urgently ask Thy Father in Thy Name, that my prayer be granted.

(Mention your intentions here.)

O Jesus, Who has said “Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass,” through the intercession of Mary, Thy Most Holy Mother, I feel confident that my prayer will be granted.

(Mention your intentions here.)

heart and gave me to know, by His profound gaze, how good He found it to be next to my heart.” (*Diary of St. Faustina*, 1442)

The Child Jesus has been depicted in a variety of ways. At times, He is shown giving a blessing with His right hand. He’s also been pictured holding a globe, a book, a bird, and even grapes, a symbol of the Holy Eucharist. He’s also referred to by a variety of names—Latinos love Him as “El Santo Nino”; Italians reverence Him as “Il Santo Bambino”; Germans herald Him as “Christkindel.”

But perhaps the Child Jesus is best known under the title Infant of Prague. The statue, found in the Czech Republic, is actually Spanish in origin. It was a wedding gift to a Spanish woman who married a Czech nobleman. In 1638, Father Cyril a Matre Dei found the statue lying in church with its arms shattered. While praying one day, he heard the Infant Jesus say, “Have pity on Me and I will have pity on you. Give Me My hands and I will give you peace. The more you honor Me, the more I will bless you.”

Later, the clergyman heard the Infant Jesus say, “Place Me near the entrance of the sacristy and you will receive aid.” A few days later, a wealthy man offered to repair the statue. It has since gained

worldwide attention for being associated with miraculous healings and the protection of the church through several wars.

### A Devotion for Our Times

Special allegiance to the Infant Jesus seems particularly appropriate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as Catholic women are called upon to use our unique feminine genius to counter the culture of death. It is fitting to pray to the Child Jesus to end the abortion of God’s precious children. In fact, Priests for Life, a pro-life organization headed by Father Frank Pavone, encourages women who have undergone abortion to entrust their deceased children to the Infant Jesus. The baby Jesus can heal hearts, change minds, and save lives. In a world torn apart by violence, even violence in the womb, the child in the manger offers hope—the Christmas story that never ends.

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association with the Divine Mercy. In her diary, the saint recounts:

“When I arrived at Midnight Mass, from the very beginning I steeped myself in deep recollection, during which time I saw the stable of Bethlehem filled with great radiance. The Blessed Virgin, all lost in the deepest of love, was wrapping Jesus in swaddling clothes, but Saint Joseph was still asleep. Only after the Mother of God put Jesus in the manger did the light of God awaken Joseph, who also prayed. But after a while, I was left alone with the Infant Jesus who stretched out His little hands to me, and I understood that I was to take Him in my arms. Jesus pressed His head against my

