

Christmas Mass during the Day December 25, 2016

Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10 Hebrews 1:1-6 John 1:1-18

Dear friends, as we gather together on this Christmas Day to celebrate the Eucharist around the little Babe of Bethlehem it is our privilege to wish you a Merry Christmas. May the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus always be in your hearts as it is today. Our prayer for you is that the Joy and Peace of the Lord may be with you and your family today and every day. Every new-born child is a wonder, a mystery, a gift of God. No matter whether the family is wealthy or poor, whether the child is the firstborn or the latest in the long line, all who gather round are moved. We smile, cry, laugh, bring a gift, and wish happiness and peace for the little one. For us this child is a sign of hope and faith in the future. For Christians, however, Christmas is not only about a baby born 2000 years ago. While it does recall that momentous event, more importantly it proclaims the feast of our salvation heralds the second coming of Christ and celebrates the inauguration of God's Kingdom. It is astonishing to recognize the presence of God in a tiny, vulnerable infant, so unexpected and so overwhelming. Once again our God surprises his people. Our expectations, our old ways of seeing the world, are overturned by the hope that lights up our darkness. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, says Prophet Isaiah. God has fulfilled his promise and has come to save the world. Today God invites us to follow the star and go wherever it will lead us. Like the shepherds let us be alert to the song of the angels and experience the peace and joy in the little child of Bethlehem. We pray that the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus always be in our hearts always.

The feast of Christmas is a celebration of joy, love and peace. It is a feast of joy for us when we celebrate the birth of the King of Kings and go ahead to recollect the greatest moment in history. On this day we contact each other and greet them with the feast day wishes, exchange cards and sweets. We share with each other this happy event of the birth of the saviour. On this day even enemies speak to each other and those who have been fighting wars will stop it for the day and call it a day of truce. They cannot fight on a Christmas day for sure. They will continue the next day. It is a celebration of love when God showed his love for us by sending his own beloved son who will continue to live with us and share his life with us. This birth of Jesus as a child is the greatest moment of God's love. It is a day of peace experienced in the hearts of people and this is what was proclaimed by the angels at birth of Jesus: peace to those of good will. Jesus the God of peace will give his peace for us and this peace will last forever. The readings resonate with the theme of light and the baby in the manger is the Light of the World. Light surrounds the shepherds as the angels sing the praises of God: "Glory to God in the highest and, on earth, peace to all who are favoured by God." Christ chose to enter the world in total poverty. The only riches he depended on as a babe were the love and protection of his mother and foster father. In a sense, it was the generosity of Mary and Joseph that gave God the Father the proper portal through which his Son would enter the world.

Christ is the culmination of God's revelation in the world. His arrival is celebrated in a simple way with angels announcing peace to the world. This child is the light for the peoples that call the world out of darkness. Prophet Isaiah tells the people of Israel returning from exile about the beauty of the feet of the one who brings the good tidings, who publishes the message of peace, who publishes the salvation of people and who announces the good news of God's rule among people. The good news is that the new life is awaiting the people coming out of their exile. Their God would set them free and help them return once more to a clean and purified Jerusalem. But this return like the Exodus from Egypt centuries earlier was a type or foreshadowing of the greater redemption that was to come. The possession of the land of Canaan for a few years, the restoring of Jerusalem and Judah were but a pale shadow of greater restoration and the possession of the eternal Promised Land which were to be given in the days to come not only to Israel but to all the nations. The good news is brought by the Son of God who comes as a mighty God and the Prince of Peace. The Prophet calls the people to respond in joy and in songs because the Lord has come to comfort them and give them consolation.

The second reading of today begins with the revelation of God to the world. This letter was written to show how superior was the new covenant over the Old. It is superior because it is given by the Son of God who is superior not only to the prophets, priests and patriarchs but also to the angels and all heavenly messengers sent from heaven in the old dispensation. Today's reading gives full description of the divinity of Jesus. The author to the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that in the early days, God spoke to our fathers in faith in many and various ways through the Prophets. Now God has spoken to us through his Son directly. This is in reality the perfection of revelation that has taken place in Jesus Christ. In his human nature after his resurrection Christ was made heir of all things. As God in his divine nature he was from eternity heir of all things, Son of God. The pre-existence of Christ is stated here, namely in his divine nature. He cooperated with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the act of creation. He is the reflection of the glory of God. He is the basis of our hope of the future, for the Son of God through his humanity and because of his infinite divine love for us has made it possible for us to reach heaven when our earthly days are over.

The Gospel of today is the Prologue of John the Evangelist. The Gospel of John was written long after the other three gospels. The basic doctrine of faith that Christ who lived, suffered and died in Palestine, rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, was not a mere man but the Son of God who took human nature for our salvation was already being taught and practiced. The other three Evangelists had already given a written synopsis of the faith that had been preached emphasizing his divine and human nature. But John's gospel presents the theological vision of Christ, the result of years of preaching and contemplating on the wondrous mystery of God's love. John while stressing on the divinity of Christ leaves no doubt as to the reality of his human nature. The reading begins with the sentence: "In the beginning was the word," indicating the beginning of time and the creation of the universe. Mark at the same time begins with Christ's public life, while Matthew and Luke go back to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Here John says three things about the Word, which is to say he says three things about

Jesus. He tells us that the Word was there at the very beginning of creation. Secondly he says that the word was with God meaning that there is a close link between Jesus and God. Finally he says that the Word was God, indicating the true divinity in Jesus. God's Word is special. It is creative. God's Word does not just communicate an idea. It is active; it brings things into existence. Everything that exists flows from the creative Word of God. In a special way it brings into being; it gives life. In the Old Testament the Word of God meant the revelation of God himself in power, in grace, in prophesy. The Word who was divine was from eternity, was at the same time distinct from the Father. The Second Person in the Godhead cooperated in the creation of all things and therefore he is not only distinct from creatures, he is also co-creator.

The preaching of John the Baptist prepared for the public ministry of Christ. He spoke of the light, meaning the revelation of the Messiah, who had already come into the world. The world of creation is such that if people used their intelligence they should have known the creator through the creatures. In the Incarnation the Son of Man came to his own people and told them who he was and he his own people did not accept him. The purpose of the incarnation was to raise humanity to the supernatural level of adopted sons of God. Those who accept Jesus and his doctrine are capable of this divine sonship. Thus the belief in Jesus and his teaching is the source of all grace and truth. Those who accept Christ is reborn and regenerated not as natural children but as the spiritual children of God. This also indicates the birth of Jesus without the human intervention but through the power of the Holy Spirit. This word was divine and continued to be divine and at a particular moment in history assumed the human nature. John uses the word Flesh which was used in the Old Testament to indicate the transitory, mortal and imperfect nature. But, in taking on flesh, the Word became visible and understandable to our finite minds. In Jesus, the Word became the bridge between our very limited minds and the utterly transcendent being that is the Triune God. But this word became human and pitched his Tent among us, thus becoming one among us. That is the Christian mystery where God emptied himself to become one of us.

John was one of the first four disciples to follow Christ and therefore was the witness to the public life of Jesus from the Baptism up to the Ascension. Having now brought the hymn of the Incarnation to the climax, the word becoming flesh, he does not use the term Word any more but speaks of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Evidently John the Baptist knew the divinity of Christ by revelation. Here the Evangelist continues to profess this divinity understood in its fullness of grace and truth which the God-man brought us and we are the beneficiaries of this through the sacraments we receive. Again the Church is the instrument of this grace for us. As the word of God tells us that one grace gets another and so on this day the presence of Jesus among us brings grace upon grace so that we all become beneficiaries of his nativity, the birth into the world. John further tells us that God is not visible to the human eyes for he is the Spirit. But he has made himself visible to us through his Son Jesus and through him we can grasp his infinite love and mercy, his compassion and his loving understanding of his forgiveness and human touch. He the God who is in intimate union with the Father and is now in touch with us and hence we become sharers in his divinity in this world. When we look at baby Jesus in the manger, or when we look at a holy picture of our

Lord, or even when we look at Jesus on the Holy Cross, in each case, through the physical form of Jesus that we see, we see the glory of God manifested in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Through Jesus, we have come to know the love and goodness of God. We have come to know the forgiveness and mercy of a God who has never forgotten his people, a God who welcomes us all to be adopted as His children through the Sacrament of Baptism and our perseverance in living faith. Today, we have gathered here to give thanks to Jesus for having come into the world. Through our praise and worship, we glorify the Lord Jesus. And by glorifying the Lord, we see His glory all around us.

Christmas day is a special time of the year. It is a time when our spirits, bursting with joy, are uplifted towards God. It is a day when the glory of God manifests itself very clearly in each and every one of us who are celebrating the coming of Jesus into the world. The message that the church wants to give us today and the Holy Church wishes us the good tidings of the arrival of Jesus on Christmas day is what we received during the Advent Season of the real presence of God. The Gospels tell us that God loved the world so much that he gave his only son for our sake that we may have life through him. He gave this son in human nature out of love for us, who will dwell among us, teach us, share his life with us and finally will die out of love for us. On this day Jesus invites us to share this love with all. He came to the world to give peace and he wants us to be his instruments of peace to all the people and as the Angels tell us, that those persons of good will, those who are open to God's love and grace will receive that peace. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us pray that this glory of the Lord will be with us throughout the coming year so that we may always shine as bright stars in the love of Jesus. May the joy and peace of the Lord always be with you. Today as we celebrate Christmas we ask the grace that in our own lives we may be open to God's will, to respond with generosity, to allow the Almighty to work his wonders.

It was December 25, 1914, only 5 months into World War I. German, British, and French soldiers, already sick and tired of the senseless killing, disobeyed their superiors and fraternized with "the enemy" along two-thirds of the Western Front. German troops held Christmas trees up out of the trenches with signs, "Merry Christmas." You no shoot, we no shoot." Thousands of troops streamed across a no-man's land strewn with rotting corpses. They sang Christmas carols, Silent Night, Hark the Herald and exchanged photographs of loved ones back home, shared rations, even roasted some pigs. They played football and the British and French won 3 to 1 against the Germans. Soldiers embraced men they had been trying to kill a few short hours before. They showed the photos of their loved ones and shared stories. They agreed to warn each other if the top brass forced them to fire their weapons, and to aim high. A shudder ran through the high command on either side. Here was disaster in the making: soldiers declaring their brotherhood with each other and refusing to fight. Generals on both sides declared this spontaneous peace-making to be treasonous and subject to court martial. By March 1915 the fraternization movement had been eradicated and the killing machine put back in full operation. By the time of the armistice in 1918, fifteen million

had been slaughtered. Not many people have heard the true story of the Christmas Truce.

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