

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Dec 25th 2011

ANO B . NATAL



Christmas comes this year as the financial conditions of the country and much of the world are leading most to recognize that their lifestyles must change, particularly the lifestyle that buys without the clear knowledge of having an ability to pay. I do not have to tell you that many people are suffering from loss of work, the inability to pay major debts, etc. Most people are cutting back. Many do not know how much longer they can hold on.

For the Christian there is a positive facet to even negative financial events. For the Christian, these events help us to focus in on the meaning of Christmas. Many may not be able to afford the high price gifts, the expensive parties, etc, that often clouded the celebrations in the past. Instead, the Christian is forced to consider the reality of Christmas.

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of God, became one of us, assumed a human nature, through Mary. He was not born in a palace or a mansion. His parents couldn't even get themselves into an Inn. Jesus was born in a dirty stable and placed in the feeding bin for the animals, a manger. St. Francis of Assisi is credited with forming the first Nativity Scene. That makes sense. The saint who saw little value in material possessions was enthralled that God Himself didn't just become one of us, but was born as one of the poorest of us. Francis believed that poverty brought richness. Through his very poverty St. Francis sensed the richness about him as he felt the presence of God in all creation, Brother Sun and

Sister Moon, the birds, animals, stars, and particularly the people. The Eternal Word embraced this same richness, a richness not in stuff, but a richness that luxuriates in the reflection of the Creator in His Creation.

It is easier this year for us to ask ourselves, “What really matters?” It is easier for us to recognize the one joy that cannot be taken from us, the joy of the Lord. And it is fundamental for us as Christians to realize that all people have a right to this joy. We have a responsibility to sow love where there is hatred, pardon where there is injury, faith where there is doubt, hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness, and joy where there is sadness. That, I am sure you recognize is the Prayer of St. Francis, the poor man who understood Christmas.

There is a story about an old priest who would fill his church on Christmas. He always gave the same, very simple sermon. He would speak for thirty to forty-five minutes and the people would be on the edge of their seats. He only spoke one sentence, but he repeated it over and over in various tones, and in various volumes. The sentence was this: The Wood of the Manger is the Wood of the Cross. Christ came to sacrifice Himself for us to restore mankind’s ability to be spiritual. Living a life of sacrificial love, living as Christians, allows us to fulfill our obligation to bring the joy of the Lord to the world. The sacrificial love of Jesus Christ unites us to all that really matters, the Peace of God.

He came to give us peace. He came to lift our burdens of sin, self absorption and desperation. He told us to give Him our sins. He came to assure us that challenges to our health, to our lives and the lives of those whom we love, and even death are not devastating, just steps along the way to union with Him. Yes, at Christmas time we remember our loved ones who have passed away. We miss them deeply. But we also know that through the Gift of Christmas, through Jesus Christ, our loved ones remain alive in Christ.

We need to embrace the meaning of Christmas. We lose so much if we limit ourselves to being outsiders looking at the decorations, shedding a tear at the romantic carols, and enjoying giving and expressing love through material gifts. There are many beautiful aspects to Christmas, particularly the times of warmth spent with our families, but Christmas is so much more than even these wonderful moments together.

Christmas is about Jesus Christ. We possess Him. He has become one of us. And He possesses us. He has given us the ability to be united to Him.

Jesus Christ is real, not just in the world, but in each of our lives. We need to give Him our sins, our troubles, our concerns, and trust in Him. We need to be Christians, people who live as He lived, living in sacrificial love.

Yes, we all want an end to the economic difficulties so many of us are experiencing, but our hope is not in the economy. Our hope is in Jesus Christ. All our hope is in You, Lord, all are hope is in You. All the glory to You God, the Light of the World.

So we celebrate Christmas this year perhaps in a purer way than in the past. We celebrate the One who gave Himself to us. We celebrate the One who calls us to seek Him out in the poor, suffering and outcast of the world. We celebrate the One who calls us to give ourselves to Him.

And shepherds on the hillside heard a sky full of angels crying out, “Glory to God in the highest and Peace to People of Good Will.” Peace to you. Peace to your families. Peace to our country. Jesus Christ is all that matters. Jesus Christ is the One who matters. With Jesus Christ, we will have peace.

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