

The Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord: Pax Christi!

Merry Christmas, everyone. May the Peace of Christ that draws us to the humble stable of Bethlehem, fill our minds and hearts. May our families have peace. May our country and our Church have peace.

Every year brings with it unexpected blessings, and unexpected challenges. This year has been no different than any other. No matter what life has brought us, there is something extremely beautiful that at the end of the year we are celebrating our reason for hope.

Jesus the Christ has been born! The eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Word of God, has become flesh and dwelt among us.

What does this birth in a stable mean to me, to you, to the world? It means that mankind's reality is being drastically changed. Before Jesus, man was merely a physical being. He was created to be physical and spiritual, but he forfeited his capacity for the spiritual to the power of evil. The grasp of evil is still experienced in many people turning to the secular values of life to find hope, fulfillment and salvation. Glamour, fame, power, prestige and money preoccupy much of their attention and energy. Many people, and perhaps, to some degree all of us, look for hope in the wrong places.

Jesus Christ is the source of hope. His life is the antithesis of those secular values that so many grasp and that lead so many to despair. He is the King of Kings, yet He is born in a stable. Our nativity scenes often whitewash the fact that stables are dirty places, stinky places. We contemplate Jesus in a manger for his throne, but we forget that a manger is a place for animals to get their food. The One who is the source of hope makes it clear from the first moments of his life outside of his mother that hope is found in God, not in materialism of any sort. Isn't it sad that many have transformed the day we celebrate the birth of a child in a stable into a celebration of materialism? When St. Francis of Assisi, the man who embraced Lady Poverty, built the first nativity scene in 1223 in Greccio, Italy, he called upon people to celebrate the life of the Poor One who was in fact our Savior.

Jesus Christ is our Savior. His name, *Jesus*, means *God saves*. We needed to have our capacity for the spiritual restored. We needed to be saved from eternal death. We needed to be saved from the power of evil, the dominance of Satan. How? How is it that He saves us? Jesus responded to the hatred of the devil with the Love of God. He let evil do its worst to Him, out of obedience to the Father and love for those creatures made in God's image and likeness. He was born and placed in a manger so He could die on a cross.

Satan, the one who had been Lucifer, the Light Bearer, wanted to be like God. He and his evil followers were cast out of heaven by another angel, Michael, whose name means "Who can be like God?" Satan then waged war on the creature made in

the image and likeness of God. He told Adam, mankind, Eve, mother of the living, and the rest of us that if we immerse ourselves in the material we could be like God, gods ourselves. But the result of our pushing God out of our lives was radically different than expected. It did not make us gods. Instead our world was filled with hatred, and death. Even worse, infinitely worse, we no longer possessed the life of God, the spiritual life.

But God still loved us. Satan's plan was to use God's love for us against Him. If God were to become a man, the devil would destroy Him with hatred and death. Surely, mankind would realize how powerless God was and how powerful Satan was. Perhaps Satan thought that he could then conquer heaven. But the death of the Word made Flesh did not bring about a triumph of hatred. It brought a triumph of love. And Satan saw those creatures who had forfeited the spiritual, have their spiritual lives restored. "Who can open the Book of God's Plan?" the angel in the *Book of Revelation* calls out. Only the Lamb who was slain could do that. The birth of the child in the manger, Jesus, the Savior, resulted in the Triumph of God. Love conquers all.

Today is a day of love. It is a day when families and friends express their deep love for each other. The gifts we give each other are mere tokens of our love for each other. We want to love today. But sin holds us back from loving. We cannot truly love the brother, the sister, the parent, the child, for whom we still harbor a grudge. The sinful person cannot love. Sin and love cannot coexist. But, sin can be and will be forgiven by the Savior. The thought that has been playing in my mind throughout Advent is that we cannot love the child in the manger unless we trust the man on the cross. Jesus came to forgive sins. He came to restore life. He came to restore love.

In the Church we have a season for Christmas and a season for Easter. We prepare for each by Advent and Lent. But really, there is just one celebration. That one celebration is the celebration of our salvation, the celebration of the Life that makes all life worth living.

"Pax Christi!" we shout out today and every day. May the Peace of Christ come upon you and remain with you forever. And what is this peace? It is not the cessation of wars, although we continually pray for an end of all war. It is not complete harmony in all our families, although we continually pray that our families be at peace. The peace of Christ is that which flows from union with God. The more we keep God in the center of our lives, then the greater that we will experience the peace of His Son.

A child is born for us today. A Savior is given to us. He restores our spiritual life. He gives our lives meaning and purpose and fulfillment. May we view every challenge and every joy from the perspective of the One who is the Center of all Creation. It is here for us. It is here for you. It is here for me. He is here for us. He is here for you. He is here for me. We can have peace. If we keep God in the center of our lives, we will have peace, a peace infinitely greater than any the world could provide.

May the Peace of Christ be with you!