

CHRISTMAS MASS DURING THE DAY/B 2005

On this day of Christmas, with the whole church and all the people of Good will on the earth, we rejoice, because in Jesus Christ, God has taken flesh and has become one of us. All the readings of this day focus on the importance of this great event of the Incarnation of Jesus that has changed human history.

My friends, in times past and in many and various ways, God has spoken to the prophets and the illustrious persons, but none of them had seen God face to face. When Moses said that God talked to him and gave him a mission of liberating Israel from Egypt, it was just through a burning bush. When the prophets said that God talked to them and gave them important missions, it was just through a vision they had had. This shows that God in himself is invisible, as the book of Exodus states: No one can see God and remains alive (Ex 33, 20).

But, in Jesus Christ that invisible God has chosen to become a human being, visible and touchable. The 2nd reading testifies clearly that Jesus Christ is the refulgence (which is radiance or brilliance) of the Father and the imprint of his being, who sustains all things by his mighty word. In this perspective, Jesus is the most excellent revelation of God, the clearest and the most eloquent manifestation of the person of the Father, and the Gospel of today tells us why this is so.

John tells us that the Son of God is the word of the Father with whom he created the universe. From the beginning, this word was with God and, at the same time, is God. So, in Jesus we have God; Jesus makes God visible. This word was made man like us, spoke a human language, and that he could tell us about the Father, what we are for him, and his plan for us. Therefore, if we want to know the Father, all we have to do is to behold Christ, see what he does, listen to what he says and teaches, watch how he behaves, the people he goes with, where and with whom he takes the meal... because this is what the Father does. As I said above, God cannot be seen, and yet he can be met, listened to, touched in the person of Jesus. The 1st thing that the Incarnation reveals to us is that God loves mankind; he is a God who cares for us and saves. In that lies the good news of Christmas.

The consequence we draw from such an understanding is that every person is important before God, whatever has been his/her life in the past and right now. Even if from the point of view of society you are not well considered, because of your past life or your present mistakes, for God you count a lot and deeply. Another consequence is that if God loves us so much, why not love him in turn? If God has become one of us to show us the abundance of his love, why do not people love each other also? Why do they kill each other? Why hatred, revenge, lack of forgiveness, justice, etc? We cannot celebrate Christmas without asking ourselves these questions? Let us make a difference in our lives with this Christmas 2005.

What is the true meaning of Christmas? Christmas is the feast of the loving exchange between God and humanity. It is the celebration of the mystery of his

coming into our world and the recognition of his dwelling among us. By becoming a man God gives human beings access to his divinity as well as he shares in our humanity. From now on, then, we know that God is at the heart of our world; he is involved in our history and in our lives. He is our partner forever. Our history becomes his history; our life becomes his life and our concerns become his concerns. We cannot celebrate Christmas and overlook that God is sharing with us our victories and our defeats, our successes and our failures.

Christmas reminds us that as human beings, we have to strive for God, that we have to live not only according to human patterns, but also according to God's law. Anytime we try to separate God and human being, the divine and the human, we overlook the fundamental truth that God has become one of us to make us divine. Christmas reminds us that human fate and God's destiny are inseparable. There is no true humanity without God's adoration; there is no adoration without the respect and the service of human beings. But, it is also true that the service of human beings loses its meaning if it is not constantly renewed and deepened out of the source of the love God has revealed for us in Jesus Christ.

That is why we run a risk of losing the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus and the reason why he took flesh and became a man. In fact, our society has made Christmas a feast of family, an opportunity to exchange presents and to meet friends. All this is legitimate, but I wonder if eventually we do not run the risk of making Christmas just folklore. The very recent debate about the celebration of the Nativity gives me arguments. Some focusing on the paschal event say that it is not important to celebrate Christmas; do they not forget that the birth of a person is the beginning of his life on earth? The subsequent changes someone undergoes in life, growing from young to adult, are not they steps of life that has started at birth? If Christ was not born, how could he die on the cross for us?

All this, my friends, is just to say that Incarnation and Redemption are linked. What happened on the cross is the outcome of the mystery that has started at the Incarnation. In other words, during the whole life of Jesus, from his birth to his resurrection, incarnation and redemption are weaved together; there is no way of separating them. The events of Incarnation and Redemption are one and indivisible, from the beginning of Jesus' earthly life to his death and resurrection. If the Incarnation is not conceived in the frame of Redemption, as the beginning of the healing of a sinful humanity, the paschal mystery becomes void, without foundation.

Because in the Christmas event our salvation has already started, let us rejoice with the angels and all the men and the women of good will. Let us reject godless ways and worldly desires and live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age. Let us call upon the prince of peace to bring peace to our troubled world. Let us ask the infant Jesus to bring us his peace that surpasses all the good someone can wish for himself. Merry Christmas to everybody and God bless you on this Christmas season.



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