

## **Christmas Mass During the Day B/2011**

Today we celebrate with the whole Church throughout the world, with the angels and archangels in heaven, and with all men and women of good will on earth, the wonderful event of the birth of Jesus Christ and his incarnation in our world. All the readings of this Christmas day invite us to rejoice as we contemplate the mystery of God made man, born on our planet, and lying in a manger for the salvation of mankind.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah describes the joy and the cheerfulness that stirred Jerusalem at the return of the deportees from exile in Babylon. At that time, the whole country was in joy, as the period of slavery and humiliation was over. The good news of peace and salvation was on all the lips, from the watchmen on the top of the mountains to the simple inhabitants of Jerusalem.

The people were happy because, by liberating them, God wanted to restore the ruins of Jerusalem and to redeem the city. He wanted to console his people at the sight of all the nations so that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of the God of Israel.

In spite of all that, however, the people of Israel forgot so easily the wonderful actions of God in their favor and went on sinning. Time and time again, they abandoned God's ways and set their hearts on foreign gods and the things that could not save them.

Why do we recall this episode of the life of Israel? We recall this episode because it has a symbolic meaning for us. In fact, the story of Israel is the story of each one of us and of our continuous rebellion against God. As we know by experience, we are not all the time obedient to God. We do not always live or act according to his commands. Sometimes, we simply act by following our human feelings and desires as contrary as they might be to those of God.

But, is God rejecting us for that? No; on the contrary, he gives us a new chance. That is why, in his mercy and bounty, he did not reject the people of Israel, but rather he tried to rebuild anew relationships with them and to talk to their hearts in order to bring them back to him.

The second reading of this Christmas recalls the many attempts of God to win Israel back to him and gives us a glimpse of the identity of Jesus. First of all, God tried to talk to the Israelites through their ancestors, but it did not work at all. Then, he sent them the prophets in order to teach them and let them know his will. This way did not work either. Eventually, when the fullness of time was fulfilled, he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, so that he might be the savior of the world.

All this helps us understand why, in today's Gospel, John presents Jesus as the light of the world without which we will be living in darkness. As a matter of fact, in a world dominated by the darkness of sin and the shadow of death, Jesus comes to us as the light that enlightens the world and everyone who believes in him. His coming dissipates the shadow of doubt so that we come to the true knowledge of God and receive eternal life.

To receive Jesus is to receive the Father who sent him, and to inherit the eternal life. Jesus is the word of God with whom the Father created the universe and with whom he continues to sustain the world. Since the beginning of creation, this word was with God

and this word was God. That is why, as St John says, in Jesus God is fully present since Jesus makes visible the invisible God. This word was made a human being like us, spoke a human language, and dwelt among us so that he could tell us about the Father and what we have to do in order to belong to his kingdom.

From Jesus we have received the fullness of life and of the knowledge of God. From Jesus we have received grace over grace, because the invisible God that nobody had seen before was made visible to us in Jesus. From now on, we know that the invisible God can be met, listened to, touched and approached in Jesus Christ.

That is the good news of Christmas, namely that God has become closer to us more than ever in Jesus. Now we know God more clearly than it was before. Thanks to Jesus, we now know that God wants us to be his children, each one individually, through faith. Thanks to Jesus, we now know that God loves us and wants to save us.

Christmas is the celebration of the power of love; a love so great that it did not resist to descend on earth and to dwell among us. As a matter of fact, when someone loves, he/wants to be there for the beloved one; he/she tries to make himself/herself available all the time for the beloved one and not to live at a distance. That is exactly what God has done by sending Jesus in the world.

But is not love demanding? Who can love another without hoping to be loved in turn? That is why at Christmas, the baby Jesus in the crib is begging our love, because he is the first to have loved us. At Christmas, the baby Jesus has accepted to be born in a manger in order to share in our poverty. The thing, however, is that he did not share in our poverty so that we remain poor, but so that we become rich of God. How, then, can we become rich of God, if we do not make a room for him in our hearts?

That is why, beyond all the festivities and the commercials in which we are involved in this season, it is good to remember that we have to make a room in our hearts for Jesus so that he may be born again. In that perspective, Christmas is not a commemoration of an event of the past, but rather of an event that takes place today as we let Jesus dwell in us and live by his spirit.

Of course, there are many ways of celebrating Christmas, but this one is the best, because it can make a difference in our lives, in our families, in our business and in our relationships with one another. If we cling just to the spirit of the season, we will miss the true meaning of Christmas as God coming to us in order to transform our history and our lives.

Let us make Christmas an opportunity to meet God and to embrace the salvation. Let us call upon Jesus to bring peace to our world. Peace to you with whom we gather in this celebration; peace to your families and to those you love in your hearts. Merry Christmas and God bless you all!

**Isaiah 52: 7-10; Hebrews 1: 1-6; John 1: 1-18**



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