

Christmas Midnight Mass A/2016

Some nights are memorable; others are unforgettable. What makes such nights unforgettable and memorable are the great events that have sanctioned their outcome and have left an impact in the lives of those who lived them. That is how Europeans remember the night following the end of the Second World War. That is how Africans still remember today and recount the story of the night of their liberation from European masters. That is how American people still recall and recount the night the union flag was still there as the British army was defeated.

This is another night, not similar to other nights, but unique in human history, a night in which God, in his love and bounty, has become a man like us in order to save mankind. This is a night of joy, where we see displayed before our own eyes God's love for us and for our world.

This night is rooted in the collective memory of the people of Israel as it stretches back to the prophets and to the promise God made to their forefathers to give a savior to the world. As we heard from Isaiah, it was at the time when the hope of the country was lost and any prospect of future was null that God visited his people and gave them a firm promise of liberation.

It is that joy of liberation that Isaiah expresses in this beautiful hymn: Those who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shown. Those whose yoke has burdened the shoulders have received relief. Everything that is a reminder of battle, war and blood has been burnt forever in flames.

Why such a joy? The reason for this rejoicing lies in a sign the Lord has given to his people. That sign is a child who is born, a Son who is given to them, upon the shoulders of whom rest all the dominions. That son is a Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, and Prince of peace. His kingdom is as vast as the world; his reign is as peaceful as was that of David; his judgment is as righteous as Justice has never been in the world.

Jesus is that Son and God-Hero. He is the fulfillment of God's promise made to the patriarchs. He is the redeemer of the world and our Savior. The Gospel of this holy night narrates what happened at that time when Jesus was born in the small town of Bethlehem in Palestine.

The historical and geographical data surrounding this narrative intend to tell us that Jesus is not a tale or a legend. His birth really took place in this world and under known circumstances. He is rooted in human history. He has a family and a country from where we can trace him back and identify him.

In fact, to be human is always to belong somewhere, to exist at some time and to live in some place. That is why St Luke describes the birth of Jesus as a sign of a historical event and a witness to the fulfillment of God's plan.

At the center of Christmas, there is a mystery, namely that God has become one of us. In Jesus, the ever-invisible God has taken flesh and become a human being like us. In Jesus, God has taken a human face and espoused human nature and history. Jesus is not only the son of Mary, but also the Son of God, the Savior; he is not only the prophet

of Nazareth, but also Christ and Lord. From now on, we know that God has a face and a name. From now on, we know who God is for us and who we are for him.

Jesus is God's gift of peace to the world. Not a peace obtained through weapons, but through God's will. Whoever welcomes him and walks in his paths will have the peace of heart that surpasses any good someone can have in this life. Jesus is the Savior the Father has sent to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse us from our sins so that we become God's people, eager to do what is good in his presence.

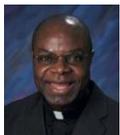
At Christmas, God invites us, as St Paul says, to reject all godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this troubled age. We really need to change our lives and to make them conform to the image of the One who has become one of us so that we become part of him. We must give up all evil behavior and choose God's way of living.

As Christians, we are assembled tonight in order to celebrate the beginning of our redemption and the incarnation of the Son of God in the world for our salvation. As Christians we witness to the truth that, in spite of difficulties and conflicts in the world and in our own lives, we are not alone. God is with us in his Son, Jesus Christ; he loves us. To know that God loves us and wants us to be his children makes a difference in our lives. It gives us the courage to confront the present and the strength to hope for the future.

Christmas is not a celebration of a past event, but of an event that takes place today as we try hard to live in the spirit of Christ. In this night, there is a revelation of God who made himself poor, but there is also a revelation of a new world and, a beginning of a new history between God and human beings. Christmas is not an event of the past; it is an event that happens any time we create a new world and a new humanity around us. Any time we share with the needy, the homeless, the abandoned and the foreigners without resources, we witness to the truth of Christmas, that Jesus was born poor to make us rich in God. It is through our care that a new world and the new humanity brought by Jesus takes place today.

That is why at Christmas, we are reminded that we are all brothers and sisters. Our hearts should be open to others. We should not be afraid of others, even if they are different from us. Let us open ourselves to the differences, for we are all equal before the crib. At Christmas, the joy and the peace of Christ are more compelling than prejudices that divide us. May we listen to the voice of wisdom of the child in the crib who is addressing us! God has given us a proof of his love by becoming one of us. Let us listen to his cry as he begs our love. Peace to you in this holy Night! Peace to your family and those you love! Merry Christmas to all!

Isaiah 9: 1-6; Titus 2: 11-14; Luke 2: 1-14



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