

## Christmas Homily (Generic) 12-24 & 12-25, 2016

Tonight we are all summoned back to the innocence of childhood. It was a time when our parents made us feel safe and loved. It was a short period in the history of our lives where we did not have to deal with cynicism or disbelief. All things seemed possible. We took it for granted that miracles were real. There was also a gentle weaving of the secular and the sacred. Children delighted in Santa Claus, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and Frosty the Snowman. The origins of Santa were immediately explained as rooted in the story of Good Saint Nicholas, a Catholic bishop. We delighted in my family to hear that Santa was a priest. The shining nose of Rudolph was immediately associated with the star that shined over the crèche of Bethlehem. I cannot tell you how many hours I spent looking up into the sky, trying to catch a glimpse of that light and maybe a sleigh. Two of my favorite seasonal television animations were *Frosty the Snowman* and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. The latter was clearly Christian, but even Frosty was possibly symbolic for Christ. Jesus enters a cold world that he might restore the warmth of God's love. The Creator comes to save his creation. Also reckoned a fairytale by non-believers, we fancy the Christ-story as true and meaningful. God made himself a snowman to save a world of snowmen and snowwomen. The children delight and dance with Frosty. Christ lived among us. As the weather warms, Frosty says, "Let's run, and we'll have some fun now, before I melt away." Jesus prophesies to his friends that they will not always have him with them and speaks of his coming trial." At the end of the cartoon and song, Frosty tells the children, "Don't cry, I'll be back again someday." As I said during Advent, when it comes to Jesus we prepare for the second coming by recalling the first. Our Lord has promised that he will return for us. The Charlie Brown cartoon is starkly Christian, focusing on a poor Christmas tree that later on does not seem quite so bad. Disappointed in the tree selected, all but Linus laugh at Charlie Brown. Hurt and embarrassed, Charlie Brown shouts, does anybody really know what Christmas is about? Linus steps forward and recites Luke 2:8-14:

"And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men.”

Then Linus says “...That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.” I should mention that even back in 1965, the CBS network and advertisers were not happy with the clear Christian message of the Charlie Brown special. But Charles Shultz refused to budge and made the Scripture citation essential to the story. He had been forewarned that others were planning to edit out the Christian elements. We must also be alert so that the message of Christ will not be deleted from our society and the lives of our families.

Have you ever pondered the awesome mystery of Christmas and the Incarnation? The vast infinity of God is somehow compacted down into a tiny infant child. Every child becomes a reflection of the Christ Child. God becomes a man. God is, in a sense hidden but present, in everything that is human. Human faces become living and visible icons for the invisible God. The Incarnation utterly changes the economy of images. Now something of the Creator can be found in his creation. Reflect upon the full impact of this mystery of faith.

- Our Lord makes himself present in the incarnate Christ.
- Our Lord makes himself present in the mystical body of the Church.
- Our Lord makes himself present in the proclaimed Word of God.
- Our Lord makes himself present in us through baptism and the Spirit of God.
- Our Lord makes himself present in his shared Priesthood.
- Our Lord makes himself present in his saving Eucharist.
- Our Lord makes himself present in the forgiveness of sins.

There is symmetry to the basic theology of the incarnation. Christ came down to earth so that we might be taken up into heaven. Jesus was born to die. Such is the full measure of the cost that he pays with the incarnation. Men and women

owed a debt to God because of the fall that they were unable to pay. God becomes a man so that infinite atonement might be made on our behalf. He could pay the price that we could not. He could repair the offense to God's honor and dignity. He is the New Adam, to make amends for the Old Adam. Christmas makes possible Lent and Easter.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen said that "the greatest love story of all time is contained in a tiny white host." The wonder of the incarnation (God taking human flesh) is extended through time and space. We will never be abandoned by God. As Catholics, this understanding would have us see the altar, not merely as a table or symbolic Cross, but also as a manger— no longer a feedbox for animals but where we find the food for men, the Bread of Life. Jesus gives us his very self. Those who reject the presence of Christ in the Church and especially in the Eucharist are stepping closer to a general atheism and away from Christian faith. Indeed, this is the most essential reason why we pray for our separated Christian brethren who deny the value of the Church Christ instituted and the sacramental life. Rejection of that which is subordinated or derivative can cast doubt upon the most fundamental truths of God— that he is the sustaining source of existence and that Christ is God come to redeem and save us.

The truth of the incarnation is what gives meaning and efficacy to the Church and her sacraments. Either Jesus is God or every Christian is a fool and all our hopes are in vain. The incarnation of Christ is the salt that gives flavor to the world. As believers, we know that God is real and that he loves us. The Holy Spirit conceived the Christ in the Virgin Mary. Our heavenly Father desires that we be transformed by the Holy Spirit as his sons and daughters, having an abiding personal and communal relationship with our elder brother Jesus by living out our faith in prayer, charity and obedience.

Every year the Knights of Columbus promote a KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS campaign. While respecting the religious sensibilities of others, we must insure that ours is a nation where there is true freedom OF religion and NOT freedom FROM religion. Do not be embarrassed to be a Christian and a Catholic. Merry Christmas!