

I love Christmas, the Mass of Christ, the celebration and worship of the coming of the anointed One to change the lives of men forever.

I love the all the sentimentality and sensual ways we adorn this feast: the beautifully decorated Christmas trees and wreaths with their wonderful smell, the manger scenes in yards, homes with lights, carols sung everywhere, presents wrapped in paper and bows, the smell of rich foods for Christmas dinner, the gathering of friends and family, the change in the temperatures which make us want to snuggle with a loved one or alone by a fire and yule log.

I love the story of the coming of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God into the world. From the gospels of Matthew and Luke, the virgin Mary was chosen to be Jesus' mother by the power of the Holy Spirit. She said yes, and divinity was united to humanity in the person of Jesus. Joseph, her betrothed, was counseled by the angel that the child was from God, and to receive Mary as his wife. On the journey to Bethlehem when there was no room for them in the inn, Jesus was born in a stable, placed in a manger where animals fed because He was to become our food when we would eat His Body and drink His Blood after the Last Supper. Angels announced the birth to the lowliest people first, the shepherds, who visited the newborn King of the Jews and began to announce His birth while the angels sang Glory to God in the Highest and peace on earth to men of good will. The Magi were guided to Jesus by a star. They offered him gold the gift for a king, frankincense the gift for a god, and myrrh a burial perfume because our Lord came to give His life for our salvation.

This story is placed in our hearts and our lips so that we will tell it to the world. Yet so that this beautiful birth not be reduced to sentimentality of a Christmas 2,000 years ago, it is important to know who this Jesus really is.

In the Bible the book of Proverbs in chapter 8 speaks of wisdom being begotten of God before time. This wisdom was present when God fashioned the earth and was God's craftsman. This wisdom perfuses all things. Wisdom played on the surface of the earth; God found delight in wisdom, and wisdom found delight in the sons of men.

Who this wisdom really is becomes clear in the gospel of John, chapter 1. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God, and through Him all things were made. In Him was life and the life was the light of men, and the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness grasped it not. St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians chapter 1 also testifies that in, through and with Jesus, all things were made and that everything continues in being, and He reconciles all things in His person making peace by the blood of the cross.

Jesus, the Wisdom of the Father, loved men so greatly that he surrendered the power of the divinity and united the essence of His divinity to our humanity in order to redeem mankind. In baptism man begins to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled Himself to share in our humanity. Jesus learned from the Jewish people what He had taught them because He is the Word of God who spoke through Moses. As Jesus matured, He became ever more aware of His heavenly Father and of His divinity.

Finally when Jesus consented to baptism, His divine power was restored when He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and received the Father's approval. Yet Jesus did not exercise His power without first offering prayer, and at the end of the day going off to pray in order always to do the Father's will and to teach us to do the same.

Jesus raised dead bodies to life; He raised dead spirits to life. Jesus gave strength to weak limbs; he gave strength to our wills. Jesus cleansed bodies from leprosy; He cleansed souls from sin. Jesus gave sight to blind eyes; He gives spiritual sight so that man might see as God sees.

A Homily for Christmas

Jesus cast out demons from people's bodies; He united the Holy Spirit to them in baptism. Jesus fed the crowds with food; He feeds our souls with Himself in the Eucharist to make us like Him. Jesus cleansed hearts from sinful desires; he placed desire for holiness in men's hearts. He cleansed minds from earthly thoughts; Jesus placed heavenly truth there.

Jesus took men from the detour to the way. Jesus freed men from the lie to the truth. Jesus freed men from death for life; "I am the Way and the Truth, and the Life."

When the time for His life and ministry was ending, he made a covenant with man to raise up man's body on the last day and give it everlasting life in a new and resurrected body forever. Jesus did this in the classic two fold way of sealing a covenant between God and man: a sacrificial meal where Jesus, the son of God, ate with man at the last supper transforming bread and wine into Jesus' own body and blood as food for the journey. On Good Friday, he sealed the covenant by shedding blood, not that of an animal, but His own.

By dying, Jesus was able to enter the region of the dead and despoil Satan by bringing up all the souls who were waiting for redemption for centuries. Jesus then went to heaven to prepare a place for us, and to send us the Holy Spirit so that we could continue His work of salvation and redemption until He comes again.

In the Christmas hymn "In the Bleak Mid Winter" the final verse says,

"What shall I give Him, poor as I am?

"If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

"If I were a wise man, I would do my part.

"Here is what I'll give Him, give Him my heart.

If someone were to give me a beautifully wrapped gift with a fine bow that when opened revealed a smelly shoe that had stepped in every kind of filth, I would throw it back at the giver. The damaged gift we give to Jesus is our heart which has either stepped in or come into contact through others with every kind of sin. This is the perfect gift that Jesus desires.

Jesus takes our hearts, cleanses, heals, and transforms them in to perfect hearts full of truth. He gives them back to us, places them in our breast so that we can know, treasure, and tell His story to the whole world so that all may believe and be saved and loved by Him.

Our tainted heart is our gift to Jesus

A new heart spilling over with love and enthusiasm to tell all about Jesus is His gift to us. Jesus is the Father's gift to men at this celebration of the Nativity.

Merry Christmas!