

Christmas Message 2017

Emmanuel – ‘God is with Us’

The liturgy of Christmas announces:

‘For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of God’s glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind,

so that, as we recognise in him God made visible, we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible.’

This ancient prayer of the Christmas Mass draws our attention to the mystery discovered in the Manger. It invites us to perceive the wonder, the anguish, the hardship, and the hope revealed in the Incarnation. This Christmas prayer turns our eyes to the divine nature of God in the flesh and humanity of a little child. The perennial Christmas message draws us from the visible reality of our world into an encounter and involvement with the divine.

Christmas re-assures and reminds us that God is with the vulnerable and needy. God, made visible and personal in Jesus Christ, is the God of the homeless, the God of all whose lives and existence is on the edge. The God incarnate in Jesus invites us to reach out to those in need. It is God’s plan of salvation that through our active and participative membership of the Christian community, the Church, through our work and charity, his love may reach and assist the vulnerable and needy. There is also spiritual power in numbers, in the community drive and spirit promoted by local Churches.

Christmas, as in the words of this prayer, invites us to recognise the presence of God in life and its many circumstances. For God, Emmanuel, is with us and among us. God is with the child conceived and growing in the womb, is with expectant mothers and fathers as they welcome the new life and gift of love into the world. God is within the family: amidst the complexity and dynamics of family life, we encounter the God of forgiveness, of mercy and of reconciliation. God is with those who are sick and infirm and especially with those experiencing isolation and loneliness. God is with those who are seeking justice and peace. God is with those who suffer dependency on alcohol, drugs and other addictive behaviours.

In a world that seeks confirmation of God in evidence and proof, the serene, though profound, Christian response of faith in God’s presence is challenging and counter-cultural. And yet, the world continues to cry out in restless angst for the divine; hearts continue to search for the invisible, pilgrims explore new ways to embrace the mystery of God.

As with the child born in the manger, God is with us as we face the uncertainty of life. Each year, upheavals in personal and family life, in the life of the Church and in society highlight for us all the fragility of the human condition. As at the time of the birth of Christ, families suffer distress and uncertainty due to failure in the structures of society. There is the disillusion of indecision and the fear on the part of many, not least the ageing, of a precarious and unknown future. The spectre of homelessness and inadequate responses to the phenomenon of migration and its causes blight our world.

At the same time, there are the prophets of hope, the gifted Magi, the inspiration of the love and care of the Holy Family. There are the many who are dedicated to making a positive difference in neighbourhood and in society. There are millions of Christians, and women and men of Good Will, who put their minds and personal energy to helping the needy, to championing and working for justice, for the care of the environment and the cosmos.

God in Jesus Christ reconciled the world to himself by entering into and living human and societal reality.

Contemplating the manger with the 'eyes of our mind', we begin to realise that the presence of God is not to be found by running away from the problematic and testing predicaments of life. The divine is present in, to be encountered and embraced within the reality of life. God is with us, calling us anew to provide a room for the Christ-child, to offer our gifts in the service of others, to bring a message of joy and glad tidings to those in need and to walk humbly with others along the pilgrimage of life, to walk with courage, forbearance and faith amid the noise and confusion of life.

In these Christmas days, we think of family and loved ones dear to us, both within and beyond our reach geographically and emotionally. We yearn for the peace and harmony our hearts desire. As our gaze moves from the crib scene to our here and now, let us dwell awhile in this Christmas season on preparations for the forthcoming World Meeting of Families in August 2018: with so many from other lands we shall celebrate and explore the gift of family life for faith, for society, for humanity, for the world and for the mission of the Church in the service of divine salvation and reconciliation.

May God bless you all during this Christmas season. May God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, open our eyes, once more, to the mystery of the Christ-child among us.