MIDNIGHT MASS

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD*HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS**Vatican Basilica*

Thursday, 24 December 2015[Multimedia]

Tonight "a great light" shines forth (*Is* 9:1); the light of Jesus' birth shines all about us. How true and timely are the words of the prophet Isaiah which we have just heard: "You have brought abundant joy and great rejoicing" (9:2)! Our heart was already joyful in awaiting this moment; now that joy abounds and overflows, for the promise has been at last fulfilled. Joy and gladness are a sure sign that the message contained in the mystery of this night is truly from God. There is no room for doubt; let us leave that to the skeptics who, by looking to reason alone, never find the truth. There is no room for the indifference which reigns in the hearts of those unable to love for fear of losing something. All sadness has been banished, for the Child Jesus brings true comfort to every heart.

Today, the Son of God is born, and everything changes. The Saviour of the world comes to partake of our human nature; no longer are we alone and forsaken. The Virgin offers us her Son as the beginning of a new life. The true light has come to illumine our lives so often beset by the darkness of sin. Today we once more discover who we are! Tonight we have been shown the way to reach the journey's end. Now must we put away all fear and dread, for the light shows us the path to Bethlehem. We must not be laggards; we are not permitted to stand idle. We must set out to see our Saviour lying in a manger. This is the reason for our joy and gladness: this Child has been "born to us"; he was "given to us", as Isaiah proclaims (cf. 9:5). The people who for for two thousand years has traversed all the pathways of the world in order to allow every man and woman to share in this joy is now given the mission of making known "the Prince of peace" and becoming his effective servant in the midst of the nations.

So when we hear tell of the birth of Christ, let us be silent and let the Child speak. Let us take his words to heart in rapt contemplation of his face. If we take him in our arms and let ourselves be embraced by him, he will bring us unending peace of heart. This Child teaches us what is truly essential in our lives. He was born into the poverty of this world; there was no room in the inn for him and his family. He found shelter and support in a stable and was laid in a manger for animals.

And yet, from this nothingness, the light of God's glory shines forth. From now on, the way of authentic liberation and perennial redemption is open to every man and woman who is simple of heart. This Child, whose face radiates the goodness, mercy and love of God the Father, trains us, his disciples, as Saint Paul says, "to reject godless ways" and the richness of the world, in order to live "temperately, justly and devoutly" (*Tit* 2:12).

In a society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance, appearances and narcissism, this Child calls us to act *soberly*, in other words, in a way that is simple, balanced, consistent, capable of seeing and doing what is essential. In a world which all too often is merciless to the sinner and lenient to the sin, we need to cultivate a strong sense of justice, to discern and to do God's will. Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns ruthless, our style of life should instead be *devout*, filled with empathy, compassion and mercy, drawn daily from the wellspring of prayer.

Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, may we too, with eyes full of amazement and wonder, gaze upon the Child Jesus, the Son of God. And in his presence may our hearts burst forth in prayer: "Show us, Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation" (*Ps* 85:8).

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