



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE FILIPPINO COMMUNITY

OMELIA DEL SANTO PADRE FRANCESCO

Vatican Basilica

Sunday, 15 December 2019

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we are celebrating the third week of Advent. In the First Reading the prophet Isaiah invites the entire world to rejoice over the coming of the Lord who brings salvation to his people. He comes to open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, to heal the lame and the mute (cf. Is 35:5-6). Salvation is offered to everyone but the Lord manifests particular tenderness for the most vulnerable, the most fragile, the poorest of his people.

From the words of the Responsorial Psalm, we learn that there are other vulnerable people who deserve a special gaze of love from God: they are the oppressed, the hungry, the sojourners, the orphans and the widows (cf. Ps 146 [145]:7-9). They are the inhabitants of yesterday's and today's existential peripheries.

In Jesus Christ, God's salvific love becomes tangible: "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Mt 11:5). These are the signs that accompany the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. No trumpet call or military triumph, no judgment or condemnation of sinners, but rather freedom from evil and the proclamation of the Good News of mercy and peace.

This year too we are preparing to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation, of Emmanuel, the "God-with-us" who works miracles in favour of his people, in particular of the poorest and the most fragile. These miracles are the "signs" of the presence of his Kingdom. And since those who live

on the existential peripheries continue to be numerous, we must ask the Lord to renew the miracle of Christmas each year, offering ourselves as instruments of his merciful love for the least.

In order to prepare ourselves suitably for this new outpouring of grace, the Church offers us the Time of Advent during which we are called to rekindle the expectation in our hearts and intensify our prayers. To this end, in the richness of their different traditions, the particular Churches have introduced a variety of devotional practices.

For centuries in the Philippines, there has been a novena in preparation for Christmas called *Simbang-Gabi* (Night Mass). Over the course of nine days, the Filipino faithful meet in their parishes at dawn for a special Eucharistic celebration. In the last decades, thanks to Filipino migrants, this devotion has crossed national boundaries and has reached other countries. *Simbang-Gabi* has also been celebrated in the Diocese of Rome for years and today we are celebrating it here together in Saint Peter's Basilica.

Through this celebration, we wish to prepare for Christmas according to the spirit of the Word of God which we have heard, staying steadfast until the definitive coming of the Lord, as the Apostle James advises (cf. Jas 5:7). We wish to commit ourselves to manifesting God's love and tenderness towards everyone, in particular towards the least. We are called to be the leaven of a society that is often no longer able to appreciate the beauty of God and to experience the grace of his presence.

And you, dear brothers and sisters who have left your land in search of a better future have a special mission. May your faith be "leaven" in the parish communities to which you belong. I encourage you to increase the opportunities for encounter, to share your cultural and spiritual wealth, at the same time letting yourselves be enriched by the experiences of others. We are all invited to build together that communion in diversity that is a distinctive trait of the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus Christ, Son of God made man. We are all called to practice charity together towards those who live on the existential peripheries, offering them our diverse gifts, so as to renew the signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God. We are all called to proclaim the Gospel together, the Good News of salvation in all the languages so as to reach as many people as possible.

May the Holy Child, wrapped in poor swaddling clothes and placed in a manger who we are preparing to adore, bless you and give you the strength to bear witness joyfully.

At the end of the Mass, the Holy Father imparted his blessing and asked the Filipino community to continue to be "smugglers of the faith".

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