

Christmas 2012- Mass During the Day (9:00 am SVDP, 12:00 Noon)
December 25, 2012
Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

My brothers and sisters, I will give voice to the obvious— We need Christmas this year! In the midst of all the troubles in the world, we are called to be beacons of hope and joy to all those whom we meet. As we heard in our first reading from the prophet Isaiah: “Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the LORD comforts his people, he redeems Jerusalem.” Christmas is not a day for pessimism, nor is it a day to say, “How can I be joyous when there is so much pain and suffering in the world?” There is simply no room, even in this magnificent Cathedral for this attitude today. Why?

Simply put, it is because our Savior is born, and this, we believe, makes all the difference in the world.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta noted that, at the saddest moment in human history – the death of Jesus on Calvary – there stood Mary at the foot of His cross. And the Gospels record her saying . . . nothing. She was simply there, with her suffering, dying son. Sob she did; speak she did not. If you visit the replica of the *Pieta* in the Founders’ Chapel, you immediately can tell from the expression Michelangelo placed on her face, that Mary did not need to speak. Her facial expression spoke volumes.

Thus, there are two things that God will always understand— our tears and our silence. They are appropriate this year as we reflect back on the year past. I have often wondered what Christmas would be like for those who do not believe in Christ. Or, if you were a nominal believer, and try as I might, I come up empty. Since my earliest days, this solemnity has so profoundly shaped my spiritual life, it is difficult to conceive. And yet, I certainly acknowledge that with all the pain and tragedy in the world, this year hardly seems as though peace is triumphant over strife.

Christians in Syria are suffering tremendously, and are fleeing for their lives and for their survival, caught in the crossfire between rival Islamic groups. Only the poorest remain— and yet, is that not to whom the Savior first appeared? He appeared to the humble and the lowly, the shepherds and the animals. According to Acts, the followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch, located in Syria. As key observers have offered, “It is hard to escape the feeling that one is witnessing the end of one of the world’s oldest religious civilizations in the place of its birth.” Christians there even fear to put up a Christmas tree for fear of repercussion.

Closer to home, we deal with rapidly increasing secularism, unspeakable violence and a lukewarm attitude towards God that grows more and more palpable. And yet in all of this, we gather today to celebrate that Jesus Christ our Savior is born. We do so precisely because we will not allow the troubles of the present to crowd out the joy of this day.

Everything about Christmas is key to our approach to life, to our reason for joy and our belief in the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. I find myself thinking back to un-wrapping the figures of the Nativity set, hoping upon hope that I would be the child who would find Jesus. One never knew until the moment the tissue paper came off of the pieces, but oh, what a joy it was to have the privilege.

We would practice for hours for the family Christmas pageant, meticulously prepared by my Great Aunt, the musician, and perform for the relatives. No matter how much we confused our lines, or even if tensions were heightened during rehearsals, somehow it always seemed that the performance in our living room theatre played to rave reviews. In the midst of everything, I still never recall a Christmas without joy triumphing over sadness.

The heart of the Christmas message is summed up beautifully in one simple phrase by the 2nd century St. Irenaeus, called by Pope Benedict XVI “the first great theologian of the Church:”

For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 19, 1

The Lord left his glory behind him and has occupied the poverty of the crib, the poverty of our human condition—not too prove anything, as if God needs to prove anything to us—but out of sheer love. God became man so that we might become more like God.

Today, all of our concerns and problems, disappointments and failures— these all may be placed before the Crib, and laid there to rest, at least for now. For to us a Savior has been born in our midst, and He came to bring light to all the darkness of our lives.