

## Homily - Christmas 2017

Over the past few weeks how many Christmas songs and carols have you heard? Perhaps, an “O Holy Night” that stirs fond memories of Christmases past. Or, perhaps it was the Trans-Siberian Orchestra version of the same hymn that made you wonder if they were at the same Christmas as everyone else. It could even be Celine Dion’s version that brings tears to our eyes. Or maybe it was “O Little Town of Bethlehem” rendered by some crooner who made you feel as if you were seated at a piano bar and should have a manhattan in your hand.

Nevertheless, there is beauty at this time of the year even in the midst of winter. Our homes are filled with decorations: trees, lights, tinsel, Christmas crèches, pine, wrapped presents, aromas of Christmas meals, with balsam scented candles burning in the background. As the song tells us: So, this is Christmas and what have you done? Another year over and a new one just begun.

Amid all of this, we come to church. After all, there is no real Christmas without church, without Christ. As the popular slogan tells us, Christmas begins with Christ.

Today/tonight we share a special story, the fundamental story of the Christian life, the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. This story is rooted in reality. The story never changes. Of course, we may depict in various ways. We may speak it; we may sing it; we may act it out. However, the essential story does not change.

We do all of this on Christmas because Jesus actually came. Jesus, the Son of God, became one of us so that we could become more like him. This Christmas story radiates truth and faith from beginning to end.

God’s saving power is seen over all the earth as God comes again and again in our lives, our actions, our witness, our proclamation. Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem thousands of years ago. Yet Jesus Christ is born here, now, in what we do and how we live and in the way that we give expression to the love of God, taken flesh in Jesus Christ. Born once in human history, God is born again and again in our very lives, our homes and neighborhoods, our workplaces and shopping centers, our parks and our playgrounds.

But, this birth of Jesus represents only a small portion of the story. The full story of Jesus and his saving work fills the small book of gospels, but those same stories have filled volumes throughout history. The story

surpasses the mere recounting of events. The stories breathe Christ into our lives each and every day.

Thus, if we satisfy ourselves only with the Christmas story, only with the Easter story, only with a few segments of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we do not have the full story. In fact, without the full story we live a segmented life.

Just as a child, wants to hear more stories about the past, about the family, so too, we need to hear and participate in our Catholic stories. Every Sunday, as we celebrate the Sunday Eucharist, we have a new story telling us more about our Jesus, telling us more about our past, telling us more about who we are, telling us more about where we are going.

Why would we ever want to have just a small part of the history of our salvation? When we do not know the stories of our natural families, claiming membership in the family becomes difficult. Likewise, when we do not know our Catholic Christian stories, how can we claim full membership? Participation in the Eucharist allows us to be spiritually nourished with Christ himself.

Every day could be Christmas if we allowed the Christ child to be born where we walk, where we eat and drink, where we mix with people — family and associates, neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. Everywhere we walk we carry Christ. Everywhere we go Christ goes with us and is born again and again in those loving and messy relationships between the beloved children of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus, the heirs of God's loving promises. We make the Word flesh right here, right now. But, none of this can happen unless we know and participate in the full story of Jesus Christ.

Not knowing or living the full Christian message constitutes the best way of making the Christmas story a nice fairy tale. Without the whole story, the full drama of the Christmas story makes no sense.

As we celebrate today this part of our Catholic Christian story, may we understand and believe that there is so much more. Celebrate Christ, know the story, be part of the story, live the story so that we can proudly say and sing: "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.