

How the Birth of Jesus is to Change Us in Holiness”

It is so good to be here as your new Pastor to celebrate Christmas Mass with all of you. This truly is Jesus’s gift to me this year becoming the Pastor at St. Thomas. ☺ I’m so happy to be here and hope I can stay many years. As we gather together tonight (today) to celebrate the mystery of the Christmas: we are all called by God and the Church to rejoice in the Lord’s mercy and love which is so immense that He humbled Himself beyond our imagining becoming a little baby to save us from the power of satan, sin and death. Wow! What can we do to make this awesome reality an everyday part of our lives?

1. The first thing we need to do is to **reflect** on God’s immense love for each one of us. So much so that He calls us **“to be holy as He is holy.”** This is the greatest complement God can give us as human beings: by becoming one of us, He wants us tangibly and freely to share in His own life: in His goodness, love, truth, and beauty, in His own holiness, which is the only path that leads to joy, peace and to some day: eternal happiness. As St. Augustine said famously, *“Our hearts were made by you O’ Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”* Without this realization, we will always be somewhat or greatly unhappy in our hearts and minds, with no sense of ultimate meaning or purpose, which can lead to anger and rage against others and the world at large - I think this is the real reason why we are seeing more and more violence in our world today: be it terroristic acts, mass shootings, the ongoing evil of abortion, the wars in the Middle East, etc. But bringing it closer to home the message for each of us here is: ***Wherever we may be in our life of Faith right now, let’s make a decision today to give ourselves more completely to Jesus,*** as He has given Himself fully to us by coming into our world in the manger, in that hidden stable or cave outside of the town of Bethlehem some two thousand years ago. **The humility and gentleness of our God in becoming one of us is so amazing. It truly is a mystery why God loves the human race so much, with our lack of response in kind, but we should all be grateful that He does!** The question is: *What are we going to give God in return to Him for such an amazing and patient love for us humans?!*

2. The eternal Son of God became one of us to **reconcile us** to the Father and Himself in the power of the Holy Spirit. How can we enter into this gift of reconciliation? How are we to respond in gratitude for this gift of all gifts: eternal salvation? **We do it by living our Catholic Faith with more and more love and integrity:** *to give our heart and life to the Lord more fully on a daily basis, as I mentioned at the beginning of Advent. If any of us here have been away from the active practice of our Catholic Faith, today is the day to make a decision to change that. And to take whatever concrete steps we need to take spiritually and practically to make that happen. For example, to get our marriage blessed by the Church if we need to do so; if we are unmarried to live a life of sexual purity and integrity; to go to Confession before we receive Holy Communion - if we have some mortal sins on our souls - and to research what the mortal sins are, since we need to be in the state of grace (God's friendship) to receive the Lord worthily (1 Corth chap 11). If we have been away from Mass, to get back to Mass on a weekly basis and on the Holy Days of Obligation. To commit to a daily life of prayer, if we haven't been praying regularly. And with the help of God's grace to live the 10 Commandments and moral teaching of the Catholic Church with integrity. If we have been active in the Catholic faith, we are called today to go deeper: to draw closer to the Lord in holiness, in prayer, in doing good in His sight, in being ever more grateful for God's mercy and love in rescuing us from enslavement to sin, and in living a life in service to others in works of charity by the spiritual and corporeal works of mercy. Finally we need to be reconciled to all the people we have been estranged from, be it family members, co-workers or friends, and even reaching out to, or at least, praying for the people we don't particularly like.*
3. **To be fully reconciled to God and to our neighbor is the gift the Prince of Peace, Jesus, came to bring to the human race. Peace** - it is not something that happens automatically, or right away – it takes much patience; however, **with God's grace we can daily grow in this gift of peace.** *The peace which is the tranquility of order - the right relation, between people, and people with God, in His holy truth. True peace is not simply an absence of disharmony, but is a fruit of*

living a life of love as made known to us by Jesus. It is a life of obedient charity and service to God and neighbor and it brings ultimate meaning and purpose to our lives. **Remember the purpose of our life on earth is not to be happy in a selfish way - contrary to what the secular worldview promotes and which can so influence even us Christians - but to serve God and others, so that one day we may share in the perfect joy of Heaven. Never forget that,** for the world tells us we have a “**right**” to be happy - even if it is a selfish understanding of happiness. And then if don’t get that happiness, some lash out in violence – which we are seeing more and more of as I mentioned earlier. Jesus came to serve not to be served. In the coming year how are we going to serve God and neighbor on a deeper level? **This is the true meaning of Christmas and Divine Mercy:** *to be reconciled to God and our fellow human beings on a deeper level and to serve in a more profound and selfless way, which then brings true joy and peace both to us and the world.* May all of us ask the Christ child for the graces to be a person of peace. In humility let’s ask Jesus for whatever gift we may particularly need to live His way: *maybe we need to ask for the gift to be more charitable with others, to be more pure in the gift of our sexuality, to allow God to forgive us for some horrible thing or things we have done in the past that we can’t forgive ourselves for, to maybe be less judgmental of others, to be less materialistic, to be more focused on God and our Catholic faith on a daily basis, to maybe pray more, for the gift of being more concerned about what God thinks of us than other human beings.* **Whatever it is, the Christ child is waiting for us today with open arms full of graces to help us: to become holy as He is holy.** May we approach Jesus in the company of our Lady, who gave birth to Him and is shortcut to the heart of Christ, and ask Him for what we need in order to live our whole life in a more self-giving way. Then we will enter into **the true meaning of Christmas:** *by truly being reconciled to God and neighbor,* began by God Himself over 2000 years ago in the person of His eternal Son who came among us to bring about the salvation of the human race as a vulnerable little baby! **Jesus is now waiting for all of us with open arms. What will be our response – now, and for the rest of our time on earth?** God bless you, and have a merry and blessed Christmas.