

CHRISTMAS HOMILY 2011

Isaiah 62: 1-5 + Acts of the Apostles 13: 16-17, 22-25 + Matthew 1: 1-25
5 p.m., December 24 and 12 midnight, December 25, 2011

The infant boy of Christmas reminds us that God is real.
After all, what can be more real than birth--a rush of blood and water, the cry of new life.
The birth of the Christ-child reminds us that our salvation is accomplished by one of us,
the Christ who is born.
The Christ who is born for us.

This is the moment when dreams come true.
He is beautiful and he is ours.
O Come, Let Us Adore.

The One through whom the universe was built has united himself to his creation,
has become one with us. The Builder has become the Bridegroom of the human race.
Jesus, the One whose very name means "God Saves",
rescues us from the power of sin by becoming one like us in all things but sin,
saves us from death by dying a terrible death.
The Savior of the World is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

God becomes utterly, completely vulnerable in Jesus,
by coming into our world as a baby, defenseless and in need of our help.
He wants nothing other from us than our love, so he comes as a child.
Come, let us adore him.

If God in Christ would not have become one with us, had not united himself
to the human race in all things but sin,
then we would have forever wandered lost in a night without end.
But the Light of the World has penetrated our darkness by the gift of His love.
God becomes utterly and completely vulnerable in Christ Jesus,
so that he might bring light to our darkness.
And at what cost!! Vulnerable even unto death. A God who can be killed!

Why such a marvelous, magnificent love? Why such a glorious life?
So that we who were lost could be found by Love
and be led to our Father by His Only Begotten Son,
so we might know we are children of the light, children of God.

This is the mystery of the Christian life: to receive a new self, a new identity, which depends not on what we can achieve but on what we are willing to receive.

This new self is our participation in the divine life in and through Christ, born as Son of Mary we might become sons and daughters of God.

Jesus wants us to belong to God as he belongs to God;
he wants us to be children of God as he is a child of God;
he wants us to let go of the old life, which is so full of fears and doubts,
and to receive the new life, the life of God.

This new identity--no thief can steal from us;
by baptism it is imprinted in the very core of our being.

Thus, the celebration of Christmas is not only about the Son of God being born of Mary but also about our birth in God.

We are challenged to move beyond the wood of the manger to the wood of the cross, to move beyond adoration to imitating Christ by a life of compassion, of suffering with and for others because of the Love of the One who suffered with and for us.

The Son of God who becomes the Son of Mary, who leaps down from heaven to marry humanity, shows us the true meaning of compassion.

It is not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position.

It is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below.

It is not a gesture of sympathy or pity from one on top of the ladder of success to those who are at the bottom of the ladder.

On the contrary, as God shows us in Christ compassion means going directly to the people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.

So God does not simply speak a word of compassion to his hurting people, the very Word of God, the Eternal Word, becomes flesh and pitches his tent among us. God's compassion is total, absolute, unconditional, and without reservation.

We may be poor listeners to God's call to compassion, to be like Christ, precisely because we are afraid there is something other than love in God. But this joyful feast of Christmas is an annual reminder that we are claimed by love, led by love, enticed by love, embraced by one like us in all things but sin. God's love brings us a more abundant life.

God is with us!

The promise of Emmanuel is fulfilled in our lives, for God is with us!

No less than Mary, Joseph, and all the apostles and saints,
we too are the subjects of God's incarnation and indwelling Holy Spirit.
The "same mind," the "same love," and the "same compassion and mercy"
that we have come to know in Jesus
are given fully to us by our baptism in Christ's name and by the power of the Spirit.

Something good and beautiful waits to be born in the flesh and spirit of our lives.
Can we believe it or even imagine it? God invokes and awaits our participation.

Have we stopped expecting something new to steal in and transform our weary world,
our divided nation, our broken lives?

How can this weary corner of our world rejoice
while always living under the dark cloud of a potential terrorist attack?
How can we expect God to do something new
when we are worn out by four years of a recession
which has caused many in our land to wonder if they will find work again?
How can we expect God to do something new, the Prince of Peace to be born in us,
to use us to reconcile others, when we are worn out by political partisanship,
worn out by so many divisions in our world?

We can give more power to the dark spirits of fear, resignation, and despair
than to the Spirit of Christmas.

But the power of the Most High which overshadows Mary
makes the impossible possible--God becoming man.
God trembles, I imagine, when we stop expecting the unexpected,
when we no longer allow the dream of the Kingdom of God to enliven our days.

Can we believe that the power of the Most High will overshadow us?

Christ Jesus, the Master Builder who is our bridegroom,
invites us to build through him, with him, and in him the Kingdom of God,
a kingdom of justice and peace, mercy and truth.

Jesus Christ invokes our participation in furthering the dream
that blossomed with his birth—the dream about which he preached
and for which he died—the dream of the Kingdom of God.
God awaits our response.

The God who revealed his need for our love, and our help, by coming into this world as a defenseless baby, longs for our participation in his plan for salvation.

Will we say YES to the divine bridegroom when His Father asks us:

“Will you love my Son with all that you are,
in good times and in bad,
in sickness and in health,
until the doorway of death swings open to your heavenly home?”

Will we say “YES” to Love by the loving gift of our self to God
and by giving ourselves away for the good of others?

Will we allow Christ to be born in us today?

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi