

Christmas 2018

Yesterday I watching the Jets lose another game. At one point the cameras spanned the crowd that had many fans dressed like Santa Claus. One fellow was dressed in green and the commentator said who ever heard a green Santa Claus. He obviously did not know that the original Santa Clause wore green because he was a bishop, St. Nicholas. The modern day red comes to us thanks to the Coke Cola company promotion on their soda cans. Bishops are the chief Shepherds of God's holy people. It is his task to guide, protect and care for the fold that is the Church. Green is symbolic of HOPE. St Nicholas was a very good Shepherd. He was very generous caring for God's people. His pastoral care is a wonderful example of what it means to imitate Christ.

For Christ is our HOPE. Life as you know can be very difficult and often painful. Some people suffer beyond our ability to comprehend. Knowing and loving the infant child of Bethlehem can bring us real hope as we confront the harsh realities of life. My niece was telling me about a priest who was not such a good shepherd. He said at the funeral mass of a widow woman that the Church did not have the answer to the question of why she died. He suggested that her young teenage children ask her doctor. A shepherd does not care for the sheep when he or she is incapable of empathizing with their suffering. A good shepherd will, like the Shepherds, on that first Christmas night announce the good news, "this day in David's city a savior has been born for you, CHRISIT THE LORD." Bringing Christ into someone's life will not make the human condition disappear but it will give us the power to cope with the challenges and difficulties of life. Christ is the answer to age-old question of why so much suffering and pain.

Teaching the children in our school about the birth of Christ according to the Gospel of Luke I was emphasizing the abject poverty that God chose to become one like us in all things but sin. He was born in a stable and was laid in a manger because Bethlehem did not have any room for Him. He came into our world with nothing and left the same way via the Cross. This is not exactly a formula for attracting friends and influencing people. Public relations firms would never recommend such a course of action. Yet here we are 2000 years later celebrating with countless millions of people all over the world exactly that. No individual has had such a positive influence on the world as has Christ.

The gift of Christmas can bring joy where there is sadness. It can bring light to the darkness of sin. It can bring hope where there is despair. All of this is not just pious words to make you feel better on Christmas Eve (Day). Joy, light and hope are the hallmarks of those you allow Christ to reign over them. Jesus is not like Elf on shelf whom we bring out one a year. He is not a holiday cheer that brings fleeting joy. He is a way of life.

Now if peace, happiness and joy are not enough for you. I have even better news. Christ has made us immortal. Yes IMMORTAL. He did not come to save us for this world alone but to give us eternal life. Remember the words of the Christmas carol; "Man shall live forever more because of Christmas day." Yes, we shall see our beloved deceased loved one again. Our mourning will turn to joy. Yes heaven is real. We do not become Angels but Saints. As God's daughters and Sons adopted by Him in Baptism, we have every reason to Hope. We have every reason to feel the joy of knowing that God has become man. We have every reason to continue to express our love for the gift of Christmas by loving one another as he has loved us.

Notice how Luke began his Gospel story of Jesus' birth. He named all the important people of his time. All of them are gone into the ash heap of history. Most would never be known except for the Christmas event that they ignored and then despised. Our modern culture promotes celebrity, power, money as the goal of finding joy and happiness. Our religion must proclaim an entirely different message.

Christ is born so that you may truly live. If you want to experience lasting joy then get to know Christ better. If you want to know genuine happiness live as what God calls you to be, His Son or Daughter. My brothers and sisters May the Christ child of Bethlehem fill you with joy and happiness all the days of your life. May this be the best Christmas ever for you and your loved ones. May all of us be beacons of light guiding others to Christ throughout the Christmas season and during the entire New Year.