

HOMILY ~ CHRISTMAS DECEMBER 24/25, 2023

*I've got a roof over my head.
I've got a warm place to sleep.
Some nights I lie awake counting gifts
Instead of counting sheep.*

*I feel a hand holding my hand.
It's not a hand you can see.
But on the road to the Promised Land
This hand will shepherd me
Through delight and despair
Holding tight and always there.*

*Grateful, grateful
Truly grateful am I.
Grateful, grateful
Truly blessed
And duly grateful.*

We have many things to be grateful for, don't you agree? If you want to be happier in your life, start a gratitude journal and write down three things you have to be grateful for today. Make them specific for today. Make yourself name them even if you are going through a difficult time. This will color your whole life and will make you happier and better able to handle the difficult times.

Today on Christmas, I am particularly grateful for the Incarnation. Jesus came to earth as one of us. He is the invisible God made visible. God is way bigger than we can understand, but we can understand Jesus. He taught us how to live and love. He showed us how to live by his example. He inspired the Evangelists to write it down in the Gospels so we would have a written account of it. He suffered on the cross and rose for our salvation. He never promised us that life in this world would be easy, but he did promise that he would never leave us. He is with each of us 24 hours per day 7 days a week, and he is always caring for us. On our road to heaven, he is always shepherding us. If we stay connected with him spiritually, he will lead us through a life that is meaningful, productive and fulfilling.

I have come to realize that the Christian life is the only life worth living. Jesus gave us one very clear commandment that sums up all of the law and the prophets. *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”* We could solve all of the problems we are experiencing in this life if we would just follow this commandment. We cannot solve evil with more evil. We cannot solve violence with more violence. These are just never ending cycles. It is all about the love. The love Jesus is talking about is not the warm fuzzy feeling kind of love. It is all about the way we treat others.

As a Parish, during Advent, we have been focusing on performing acts of kindness. This is the kind of love Jesus is talking about. I think we should continue this through the Christmas Season and beyond. At times it can be difficult to keep this going. There was a man named Mark who was a pastor and devoted his life to serving the homeless. One Christmas Eve, he was exhausted from all of the Christmas preparations; and he was feeling sorry for himself on the way to the homeless shelter. There was a Hispanic man who showed up late at the shelter, and he became one homeless too many. The shelter was crowded, and he was about to tell the man that he was late and the shelter was full. He realized that he did not know the man so he asked his name. The man responded *“Hayzoos,”* this is the Spanish pronunciation for *Jesus*. He realized that he was about to tell Jesus on Christmas Eve that there was no room at the homeless shelter!

Jesus comes to us in everyone we meet every day. Jesus lives in each one of us. When we refuse to receive or perform acts of kindness, we are refusing Jesus. Performing acts of kindness will make you happier as well. It just feels good, and you are more likely to do more acts of kindness. When you receive an act of kindness, you are more likely to pay it forward. When you see someone perform an act of kindness, you are more likely to copy that same behavior. Acts of kindness have an exponential effect. This is how we can change the world, one act of kindness at a time.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim