

2018 CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM FATHER FRANCIS

Dear brothers and sisters,

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” It is purely God’s gift that we are alive to celebrate Christmas this year. Enough has happened during the course of this year that our earthly lives could have been snuffed out, but God did not allow this to happen. There are some brothers and sisters we knew and some we did not know who celebrated Christmas of 2017 but who are not on this earth any more to celebrate Christmas this year.

Dearly beloved in Christ, as we lift up the souls of the departed to the mercy of God, may we also not forget to reach out to those who have lost loved ones to the cold grip of death, for whom this Christmas is either the first or one of many without their loved ones. This will, in some measure, help those brothers and sisters not to be overwhelmed by feelings of loss and loneliness. Christmas is a season of joy that celebrates God’s giving of Himself to each one of us for the purpose of our salvation. May we, following the example of our God, also give something of ourselves and our time to our brothers and sisters in need. May no one in our community be left out.

Our Lord considers as done to Him whatever good we do to our fellow human beings. This entails that the gifts we may give to another person during this season not be limited to Christmas cards, cheese, wine, ham, money, pictures of our family, or holiday fruit cakes, but also include the gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation. Someone--a friend, family, co-worker, or an acquaintance--might have offended you in the course of the year or many years ago and you still carry the heavy weight of that wrong. May this Christmas be an opportunity to drop it, to let go and let God. **How liberating and freeing that would be!**) It will be a gift that neither you nor the person you forgive will forget. On the other hand, because nobody is perfect, you might be the one who hurt someone. Or perhaps someone feels offended by you. In that case, do not hesitate to reconcile by asking for forgiveness. The Word of God put it magnificently, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind to one another, compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32). When this happens, this word of Scripture is fulfilled in you, here and now.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed... (Isaiah 9:1-3),

Then the description of the servant of God in the prophecy of Isaiah will apply to you as well. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, saying to Zion, “Your God is King!”(Isaiah 52:7).

It may seem messy, earthy and belittling in the eyes of some people to do things required to heal a broken relationship, but the question is, “How do we understand Christmas and Christian faith?” Is Christmas a fairy tale or is Christian faith merely an intellectual and abstract idea? Pope emeritus Benedict XVI responds to this accurately when he wrote, “Christian faith really means precisely the acknowledgement that God is not the prisoner of his own eternity, not limited to the solely spiritual; that he is capable of operating here and now, in the midst of my world, and that he did operate in it through Jesus, the new Adam, who was born of the Virgin Mary through the creative power of God, whose spirit hovered over the waters at the very beginning, who created being out of nothing.”¹

Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, p.279.