

Christmas Homily 24/25 December 2018

Merry Christmas ! So we have reached that time ! It is Christmasall of the waiting, all of the anticipation is now over Wow the stress is all gone nowRight ? Nah not really ... there is still the presentshoping we have managed to please everybody with the gifts we have chosen for themand if not ... they can go to ...the store and maybe pick something else that may be more suitable ! And of course there's the dinner how much stress and anxiety is generated by that experience Wow it appears to be pretty endless but it does end and for most people it ends right after the dinner when they collapse or say : "I've got to take a nap..... I am exhausted after all of this ... all of the preparation and wanting everything to be just perfect". The Good News is that it is very rarely perfect we may have forgotten somebody, or forgotten to take the bread out of the oven or we forgot to put out the cranberry sauce !

It's really a little microcosm of our everyday lives but it becomes more than a little exaggerated always at this time of the year. We have all of those deadlines and things to do, and obligations or responsibilities to take care of, it can seem to be a little overwhelming at times ! So much so that many leave out a 'Gasp' and say : Thank god it is over. They even make plans for next year and say things like : " I am certainly not going to do that next year, or I am going to begin this earlier next year and on and on ! Amazingly it rarely seems to change. We are creatures of habit and we wind up doing many of the same ole things in the same ole way. Not that there is anything really wrong with thatbut hopefully it will become a little less stressful each year !

Christmas is such an amazing event ! It really is a great time of the year ! There is so much good that manifests itself during this time of the year. And yet it can be the most difficult time of the year for some memories of better years gone by, the absence of loved ones, the sickness or suffering of one that we were especially close to, a broken relationship with a family member that has not been healed, and doesn't hold the promise of being repaired, a divorce or a pending divorce, the one who is suffering from a major issue with addiction, the imprisonment or pending imprisonment of a loved one ...they can all be source of great stress for a family.

While they are sources of stress throughout the whole year for family, Christmas time with all of its Hopefulness just magnifies those sad events within the family.

The other major issue of Christmas, and I think it is important for us to be aware of it, is that Christmas visits us on many different levels and in reality they all have a measure of importance in our lives. I know there are many advocates out there who believe there is only one true meaning to the season and that is whatever their particular perspective is. In reality there are many perspectives to this wonderful celebration and they don't need to be in conflict with each other. We can manage many perspectives provided we are willing to see the value in each. They are layers, if you like, and each can lead us to the real meaning of the Christmas Celebration.

1. The top layer may be the consumer layer from which there appears to be no escape these days insistent on Christmas carols, Reindeer, and Santa Claus, and merchandise of all sorts and shapes. It encourages children to be a little better, to strive harder, albeit through a little fear, (You know ... 'making a list

checking it twice’) Or that newer one “The Elf on The Shelf” keeping a vigilant eye on everything. But it’s not a bad thing it yields a lot of good !

2. The next layer is the kind of Charles Dickens layer, Christmas cards, depicting snowy scenes, roasting fires, turkey, ham, plum pudding, mince pies, and all sorts of good food. It is really the Christmas of the family-get-together, with lots of goodwill, and cheer, and philanthropy, and expansiveness that is often not on display throughout the year. But it can be a great gift to the whole family system.
3. The third level is the Crib, the manger, the story of His birth among us. This includes the School Nativity Play, maybe The Messiah, (one of my favorites) and Christmas Caroling, bring the joy and good news to others, in a very special way to those who are confined either to hospitals, or Nursing homes. All good events no matter how many times you have participated in them.
4. The fourth and deepest layer is naturally the spiritual level. It is the story of how in Israel 2018 years ago a baby was born. In the person of this baby God’s only Son took on our nature and entered into our world in weakness and love. He came to remind us that each one of us, ‘no matter how much we have done or failed to do’ each of us is a son/ daughter of God ! And each one of us has an Eternal Destiny. We are destined to be with Him !

There is a tendency to dismiss, or even to condemn the first three layers, and to proclaim the spiritual layer as the only true one. That proposition is incorrect ! It is based on the old supposition that the

spiritual and material are opposed to one another. That is just not true. Christianity includes matter and spirit. There can be no such thing as a purely spiritual Christmas.

What we have to do is find a connection between the secular market place and the spiritual content of this great feastOur God come into our world as one like us in all things but sin ! What a mystery that is !!!!

This teaches us the closeness of the spiritual and the material world. That is why we can truthfully say : Christmas is a Microcosm of our everyday world, yes amped up quite a bit but nonetheless a micro of our everyday lives ! Things to do, schedules to follow, deadlines to meet, relationships to work on, others to take care of besides myself. Merry Christmas !

—Fr. Gerry Hurley