

# Christmas Eve Mass 2019

Merry Christmas ! Christmas is an amazing time of the year ..... it tends to bring so many aspects of our lives into great focus. It is such a time of paradox ....and yet, despite the wonderful experiences of giving and receiving, shopping and trying to pick out the perfect gift for that person, the wonderful carols in the malls and on the air waves .....it is one of the most stressful periods of the year for so many people. Maybe that has to do with the fact that there are so many layers to this experience ! In the midst of all of these layers, we are expected to attend a variety of Christmas Events, depictions of the Christmas Story, Christmas on Ice, the Ballet, the school pageant, Christmas parties galore, and we are expected to show up for work everyday!

Not surprising that you hear people say when it comes to Christmas Day, I'm exhausted .....why wouldn't you be? It is as if you have been in over-drive since Black Friday. It is exhausting indeed ....trying to fit everything in. The layers of the Christmas Season are demanding !

One of those layers is the **Consumer Christmas** from which there is no escape these days ..... Christmas Carols, Santa Claus, and Reindeer, and sleighs, and sleds, and the aggressive merchandizing of goods. Next, comes the **Charles Dickens** layer, the sending of Christmas cards and receiving them. Wonderful cards depicting snowy scenes, roaring fires, turkey, ham, plum pudding, mince pies. It is the Christmas of family get-togethers, good will to all, philanthropy and expansiveness. All of these values have a lot to be said for them. The third level is the **Crib** .... the **Manger Scene** which depicts for us what Christmas is all about. The school Nativity play, which re-enacts the Christmas story just never fails to touch us deeply with all of its simplicity, and sometimes confusion, and missed lines and queues, and a little scrap between the shepherds and the angels, and in the midst of all of that it is so deeply moving. Reminds us of the original story, so imaginatively and wonderfully. The story of this immigrant couple, unmarried, reporting to the father's birth place to register in accord with the census according to the decree of Caesar Augustus ! Do you think for a moment that God wasn't using Augustus as a part of bringing His eternal plan to fulfillment? It was all laid out in the beginning. Augustus may not have understood that ..... there are many things we don't understand either, as He brings His Plan to fulfillment. There are many things in our lives that we often refer to as coincidental ..... who is the "Co"? When we are truly Blessed by Him, we look again and see it was not a coincidence at all, but rather a **God- Incidence** ! How many God-Incidences are you aware of in your life ?

This is one of our great ways of coming to know Him. Becoming aware of the great calm and great comfort He brought to me in a dire or difficult circumstance. This is such an integral part of the journey of this young Couple, as they made their way from

Nazareth to Bethlehem ! A journey of just under 100 miles ..... walking all the way, and she on the back of a donkey ..... how many stops and breaks along the way!

The **Hope**, the **Faith**, and the **Patience** it must have required. The Questions !!! And then, to find no room in the Inn where travelers stayed ..... Was all of this just a foreboding of what was to come? ..... He would be rejected, not just at the Inn, but by His own people ..... They had no room for Him within !!! Mary, meanwhile, shown to be the ultimate mother caring for Him, wrapping Him in swaddling clothes and laying Him in a manger. Her loving care reflecting God's loving care !!! What a story ..... This is our story !

It is not unusual for some of us preachers to condemn the first levels of Christmas, and say there is only one thing that matters "Jesus is the Reason for the Season." In truth, all of these layers have an important place in the Season. They are here to stay, and they all form an integral part of the experience for each of us. While we fight the shopping challenges, and the immense crowds and traffic, it is important for us to remember that this is about "LOVE"! We are seeking to find the right gifts, and the right things, for those we love and care about. How easy it is for us to lose 'focus' and become angry, distressed, and frustrated in these circumstances. But, if we look carefully at ourselves ..... Christmas is a little microcosm of the rest of my year, from beginning to end. How easily things can appear to be so out of sorts, and frustrating, and distressing, when all I am trying to do is my best. Imagine if I were able to integrate my focus and ask myself, "What am I really about? .... What is the purpose of all of this that I am doing right now?" How wonderfully it could change my focus !!

We are offering 'Alpha' as a powerful opportunity in the New Year to help people explore these wonderful questions : What is the purpose of my Life ? What am I really about ? How may I continue to Grow ? Does my life have sufficient Meditation ? Reflection ?

Imagine, for example, as I head out to shop, if I were to give myself a little more time to accomplish things I need to do because I know there are lines and queues of traffic out there, and I prepare myself for that reality rather than curse the experience when I come upon it ! The great ole expression of the Christophers from the olden days says : **"Better to light a candle, than to curse the darkness."**

What a great thought ..... but it is really only going to work for me if I plan ahead to use it. When I come upon the circumstances without a plan ..... that is when I am likely to be robbed of all my Good Will ! **"Peace and Good Will"** — the Christmas message, comes only when a plan is in place ! It is not the result of some CO- Incidence ! Do I have a plan ? It makes all the difference in the world !

Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year ! — Fr. Gerry Hurley