

December 25, 2009 – Mass on Christmas Day
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Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalms 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

“How lovely on the mountains are the feet of the herald
Who comes to proclaim prosperity and bring good news,
The news of deliverance,”

Christmas is the celebration of new hope, of the good news that God is making the world anew. We live in a world where the bad news easily drowns out the Good News. Terrorism, war, corruption, greed, climate change, economic crisis, unemployment, racial and cultural conflict, interpersonal conflicts, broken families, criminal violence are just a few of the threats that confront us each day. We truly need to hear Good News today, we need to be aware that God is present in the midst of all these threatening realities; that God is with us struggling to bring about “a new heaven and a new earth.” God is not way off in the sky or another dimension. God has pitched a tent among us: “The word became flesh; he came to dwell among us,” and that changes everything.

In Bolivia it is common to hear that Christmas is for children. Individuals and organizations will go to incredible efforts to make sure each child, even the poorest, receives at least one toy, one present and something special to eat or drink. During the days before Christmas there are endless lines of poor children in the towns and cities waiting for that toy, a cup of hot chocolate and a piece of sweet bread. In the U.S. we tell children about Santa Claus who brings us what we want most; we take great joy and pleasure in the anticipation and delight of the children, even as we know who bankrolls Santa Claus. Do we think that Christmas is for children because we really don't believe, because we know that the toy and sweetbread will not reverse the undernourishment and poverty of so many children in Bolivia and other developing countries? Do we believe that Christmas is for children because deep down we know that we never receive our heart's desire? Are we so cynical as to say “let them enjoy it now before they find out the truth”? I think that we want to believe but it is not easy to put everything at risk and act on the Good News in faith.

In Luke's version of the Christmas story Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, after saying yes to Gabriel's news that she will be the mother of Jesus. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting she responded, “God's blessing is on you above all women, and his blessing is on the fruit of your womb. Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? I tell you when your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy. How happy is she who has had faith that the Lord's promise would be fulfilled.” (Luke 1: 42 – 45). Mary had faith in God's promise. She heard the Good News and she believed. She believed in God's saving presence even though she had no idea of how God would pull it off, even though she lived in a world torn apart by terrorism, war, corruption, greed, climate change, economic crisis, unemployment, racial and cultural conflict, interpersonal conflicts, broken families, criminal violence. Despite all of her questions and doubts Mary said yes.

Hearing the Good News is important, believing in the powerful presence of God among us is critical, but it is all for naught if we do not act on what we have heard, if we do not live what we believe. There is the story of a man who dreamed that God told him that he would win the Christmas lottery. He awoke very happy and began to anticipate all of the things that he could do with the money he would receive. One week passed, and then two weeks turned into months, Christmas was long gone. The man was disillusioned. Why would God fool him with that dream? That night he heard God again in a dream. He was angry and screamed: "You said that I would win the Christmas lottery. That was two months ago and here I am still broke still without any money. Why did you trick me?" God answered: "You will win the lottery, this time it will not be the Christmas lottery but you have to do your part, you have to get out there and buy a lottery ticket, then you will win!" Am I doing my part?

This Christmas I pray that we have the openness to hear the Good News that God is among us that God has pitched his tent in or midst that God is bringing about a New Heaven and a New Earth. I pray that we might see God present in each newborn baby, in each child and in each person, even in the least among us. May we see and believe; may we have faith that God's promise is being fulfilled at this very moment even as we struggle with our questions and doubts. May we believe and may we act! May we do our part!

The Word was made flesh and dwells among us, and that makes all the difference!
Merry Christmas!

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