JMJ

CHRISTMAS – B – 2020

A child is born. It happens every day. It’s a cause for joy, especially for that child’s parents and family. But the Birth of the Christ Child was a cause for joy, not only for Mary and Joseph, but for the whole human race. And we feel it every time we celebrate His Birthday – even during a pandemic.

COVID-19 shut us down this past March, in the middle of Lent; and it’s been a kind of Lent ever since. We could all use a little good news right now, even to lift our spirits for about the length of a Hallmark movie. And yet, deep inside us, we want good news that will last; we want the kind of hope that’s founded on bedrock; we want the absolute assurance that everything is going to be all right. And that’s the hope and the assurance that we have in Jesus Christ. He came to set us free from all the awful burdens we’d loaded ourselves down with and to give us hope, not only for a life here on earth, but for an endless life with Him in Heaven.

I was listening to our Catholic radio station the other night, and caught a little bit of the “Catholic Answers” program. Dr. Greg Popcak, a Catholic psychologist, was talking about Christmas in this strange year filled with so much stress and anxiety. He said that if we’re happy this Christmas, that’s wonderful; but the real meaning of Christmas, he said, isn’t in the high spirits or gifts, but in the mystery of the Incarnation: that God is here among us, now. Christmas isn’t just the remembrance of something wonderful that happened a long time ago, he said. But rather the recollection that the God-man, Jesus Christ, has never left us – that He’s here with us today, to be with us in the midst of our anxieties and worries; that He wants to be born into this world of our present stress, and anger, and illness; so that He can redeem it, and heal it, and bring peace to it.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen”: “God, rest ye merry, gentlemen. / Let nothing you dismay.” One of things I like about that song is its punctuation – where it places the comma: It’s “God rest ye *merry,* (comma) gentlemen.” In other words, they may not *be* “happy gentlemen,” to begin with. But rather, the song is to give them a *reason* to be happy, and expresses the hope that God will sustain them in that joy. “God rest ye merry, gentlemen. / Let nothing you dismay. / Remember, Christ our Savior, / Was born on Christmas Day / To save us all from Satan’s power / When we were gone astray. / O tidings of comfort and joy!”

A divine Child is born for us today. “Beloved: The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ . . .” (Titus 2:11-12).

Merry Christmas!