

FAITH AND REASON

Pope Francis Christmas blessing follows his Christmas Mass service held on the evening of December 24 at St Peter's Basilica. The service began with a liturgy known as the "kalenda" which is the Christmas proclamation of Jesus' birth. The pope processed into St. Peter's Basilica and unveiled a life-sized statue of baby Jesus, kissing it and blessing it with incense once he reached the transept of the building, The Catholic Herald reports.

The pope's sermon spoke about the "unconditional love of God" which "changes lives, renews history, liberates from evil, fills hearts with peace and joy," the Vatican website states. *"It is divine love, the love that changes lives, renews history, liberates from evil, fills hearts with peace and joy. Tonight, the love of God has been revealed to us: it is Jesus.*

"Christmas reminds us that God continues to love us all, even the worst of us. His love is unconditional; it does not depend on you. You may have mistaken ideas, you may have made a complete mess of things, but the Lord continues to love you. His love does not change. It is not fickle; it is faithful. It is patient. This is the gift we find at Christmas," the pope said.

The pontiff encouraged the masses to accept this love as a free gift from God and to give thanks in return. *"Often, we live our lives with such little gratitude...Let us receive the gift that is Jesus, in order then to become gift like Jesus...once we stop trying to change others but try to change ourselves and to make of our life a gift," he added.*

The pope also touched on the light of God during the Christmas Eve service. *...if you think your heart is poor in love, this night is for you. The grace of God has appeared, to shine forth in your life. Accept it and the light of Christmas will shine forth in you," the pope concluded in his sermon.*

Pope Benedict XVI reflected on this reality at Midnight Mass in 2005, adding his own prayer for peace that we can pray together, hoping that it will be made into reality.

Among Christians, the word "peace" has taken on a very particular meaning: it has become a word to designate communion in the Eucharist. There Christ's peace is present. In all the places where the Eucharist is celebrated, a great network of peace spreads through the world. The communities gathered around the Eucharist make up a kingdom of peace as wide as the world itself. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we find ourselves in Bethlehem, in the "house of bread". Christ gives himself to us and, in doing so, gives us his peace. He gives it to us so that we can carry the light of peace within and give it to others. He gives it to us so that we can become peacemakers and builders of peace in the world. And so, we pray: Lord, fulfil your promise! Where there is conflict, give birth to peace! Where there is hatred, make love spring up! Where darkness prevails, let light shine! Make us heralds of your peace! Amen.

The Advent and Christmas seasons provide a special time of the year to humble ourselves in front of the Child Jesus. There exist many different prayers that reflect this holy humility and invoke the Child Jesus' intercession.

One of those is written by St. John Paul II, delivered during a homily for Midnight Mass. It is a beautiful prayer, one that reflects the many spiritual dimensions of Christmas and can help us enter into a deeper experience of the celebration.

O Child, who willed to have for your crib a manger; O Creator of the universe, who stripped yourself of divine glory; O Redeemer, who offered your vulnerable body in sacrifice for the salvation of humanity! May the radiance of your birth light up the night of the world. May the power of your message of love thwart the proud snares of the evil one. May the gift of your life make us understand ever more clearly the worth of the life of each human being. Too much blood is still being shed on the earth! Too much violence and too many conflicts trouble the peaceful coexistence of nations! You come to bring us peace. You are our peace! You alone can make of us "a people purified" and belonging to you forever, a people "zealous for good deeds". For to us a Child is born, to us a son is given! What an unfathomable mystery is hidden in the humility of this Child! We would like to touch him; we would like to embrace him. You, Mary, who keep watch over your all-powerful Son, grant us your eyes to contemplate him with faith; grant us your heart to worship him with love. In his simplicity, the Child of Bethlehem teaches us to rediscover the real meaning of our existence; he teaches us "to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world". O Holy Night, so long awaited, which has united God and man forever! You rekindle our hope. You fill us with ecstatic wonder. You assure us of the triumph of love over hatred, of life over death. For this reason, we remain absorbed in prayer. In the luminous silence of your Nativity, you, Emmanuel, continue to speak to us. And we are ready to listen to you. Amen!

Sitting down to his desk, one Christmas Day, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow heard the church bells ringing. It was in this setting that Longfellow wrote these lines:

Bells on Christmas Day

I heard the bells on Christmas Day. Their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat:
Of peace on earth, good will to men!
And thought how, as the day had come the belfries of all Christendom had rolled along.
The unbroken song of peace on earth, good will to men!
Till, ringing, singing on its way, the world revolved from night today.
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime of peace on earth, good will to men!
Then from each black, accursed mouth the cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound The carols drowned of peace on earth, good will to men!
It was as if an earthquake rent the hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn the households born of peace on earth, good will to men!
And in despair I bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong and mocks the song Of peace on earth, good will to men."
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep. "God is not dead, nor doth he sleep!
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men!"

A Thought For the Day

Sunday	Isaiah 7:14
Monday	Zephaniah 3:14
Tuesday	Malachi 3:1
Wednesday	Isaiah 9:6
Thursday	John 1:14
Friday	Luke 2:7
Saturday	Matthew 2:11

Everyone can be beautiful inside: God sees what is within. He loves you within and you must love Him within for he fashions your inner beauty. Consider their words of the Psalm "All the glory of the King's daughter is within". What is the inner face of beauty? Nothing else than the conscience. There Jesus looks at us; there Christ loves you. There Jesus punishes us; there Jesus bestows on us the crown of glory. **(Commentary on Psalm 44.29)**

The Legend of the Christmas Tree: Today the Christmas tree is at the center of our festivities. Topped with a star, lights, and ornaments. It is part of the beauty and meaning of the season. How did the Christmas tree come to play such an important part in our observance of Christmas? There is a legend that comes to us from the early days of Christianity in England. One of those helping to spread Christianity among The Druids was a monk named Wilfred. One day surrounded by a group of converts, he struck down an oak tree, which in the Druid religion was an object of worship. As the oak tree fell to the earth, it split into four pieces, and from its center, there grew a young fir tree pointing agree spire toward the sky. The crown gazed in amazement. Wilfred let his axe drop and turned to speak to the people. "This little tree shall be your holy tree tonight. It is the wood of peace, for your homes are built with the fir. It is the sign of endless life, for its leaves are evergreen. See how it points towards the heavens. Let thus be called the tree of the Christ Child. Gather around it, not in the wilderness but in your homes. There it will be surrounded by loving gifts and the rites of kindness. To this day, that is why the fir tree is one of the loveliest symbols of Christmas.

May the Grace and Peace of God the Father, Lord Jesus Christ, and the Blessed Mother be with you this Christmas.

Fr. William C. Mooney

Spiritual Direction and Confession
Email: Fr.WCmooney@gmail.com
Appointments: (904) 824-6625
Follow on Facebook: [Faith and Reason](#)
Instagram: [faith_and_reason](#)