

FAITH AND REASON

O Holy Night: Let us recall the mail delivery from Stalingrad, lest to leave the City before the surrender. These extraordinary letters confiscated by the German Command Staff, found after the War, were written by men condemned to death or imprisonment. There is a letter from a young husband to his wife, in which he describes the curtains he would like on the windows and suggests a place for the cot, for the baby she is carrying. There is a letter from a pianist, whose fingers are frozen. There is a letter from the son of a General, in which he expresses his complete hatred for those accusing him of being responsible for the war, and what is happening to him. There is letter a from a Priest, which I would like to quote. "The night before Christmas, eleven comrades celebrated the birth of Christ in a hut. It was not easy to gather them together from the band of disabused, cynical, and hopeless men, but those I found came voluntarily. There are many altars in this vast world, but certainly none poorer than this one. Yesterday again, men gathered around a box where I put the grey-green jacket of a comrade fallen in combat. I read extracts from the Gospel of St Luke. I gave them Holy Communion under the form of black bread, and implored God's mercy for them. I did not speak of the fifth commandment.....

The men were seated on piles of wood, their eyes directed towards me. They needed only two things man cannot give himself: the Body of Christ and the forgiveness of his sins. And all of a sudden, they would discover the truth of their assembly, the truth that before an absolute distress there was someone who would be their companion in very simple actions. Someone who would give them hope in the face of death, someone who would give them hope even in the face of the most terrible doubt." The words that described different aspects of this event are riveting, moving, inspiring, haunting. When I think of these men, I am reminded of an inscription carved into the wall of a concentration camp during the Second World War: "I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining, I believe in love, even when I feel it not, I believe in God, even when He is silent". How difficult it must have been to believe in those days, to hope, to love. To believe in belief, to believe in hope, to believe in love, in a vast sea of man's inhumanity to man. To believe in God when he seemed so silent, so far away is a marvel to behold.

This is their story: the story of how Jesus reached out to them through very simple actions - in the Mass. The story does not begin there, the story begins with the incarnation - Jesus taking on our human nature, without which there would be no story. "In the parade of personalities, the world has seen great saints, mystics, martyrs, leaders of none of these was the claim ever made, and accepted, that they were incarnate God. Thanks to the great mercy and the marvel of the Incarnation, the cosmic scene is resolved into a human drama. God reaches down to relate himself to man, and man reaches up to relate himself to God. Time looks into eternity and eternity into time, making now, always, and always, now. Everything is transformed by this sublime of the Incarnation. God's special parable for fallen man in a fallen world" (Malcolm Muggeridge) Because of this, we sing, "Silent Night Holy Night" "O Holy Night". These words and numerous others speak of a night full of wonder: "Emanuel, God is with us" "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him" (St John). There was room at the Inn for all sorts of people: Tax collectors, soldiers of Rome, travelers from distant lands.... There was no room for the Savior of the world. Even in this, the love of God was at work: If there had been room at the Inn the shepherds could not have come to visit their Savior, they would not have been allowed past the door. They could visit the caves in the hills surrounding Bethlehem where animals sought shelter in storms, and this is where they found their Savior. The Inn at Bethlehem is a symbol of the human heart. There is room for people and all sorts of things in the human heart, but the Savior of the world is not allowed in or is confined to some corner of the human heart where his influence is restricted. In all theological study there is so-to-speak a line, which unaided human reason cannot cross without the grace of God. The truly spiritual person clearly recognizes this and humbly accepts it with great peace of soul. The words of St Augustine in the 5th century and St Anselm In the 11th century, express the abiding disposition of all the great and holy souls in the life of the Church: "I do not try to understand that I may believe. I believe that I may understand".

An event which took place in a village in Tanzania is a riveting illustration of the courageous faith which we must have. The people of the village were dying of starvation. The elders of the village met with the people, a meeting which continued uninterrupted until they reached a decision – now there's a thought. The decision was that each family give the little food it had to the runner, all of which comprised one basic meal. They hoped that this meal would give the runner sufficient energy to reach help before it was too late. This was a great sacrifice in extreme circumstances. With no food for anyone, the villagers realized clearly that their only hope of survival was to place their faith in this man. Jesus - God Incarnate is "the Way the Truth and the Life". Do we have the faith in Jesus that the villagers had in that runner? They put their lives on the line, with no guarantee of success. If we do not have that faith in Jesus, if we do not try to grow in holiness and be close to him, then difficulties, that otherwise would never exist are inevitable. If we do not strive to breathe the air of the spiritual world, we must expect "temperature inversion" fog! Joy to the world the Lord has come.... Let Earth receive her King" A Christmas message from Fr. William C. Mooney to you and your families.

Feast of Saint Stephen, first martyr: Reading 1 ACTS 6:8-10; 7:54-59: Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen, but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

When they heard this, they were infuriated, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears, and rushed upon him together. They threw him out of the city and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. As they were stoning Stephen, he called out "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Gospel Jn 20:1a and 2-8 On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

Gospel Mt 2:13-18: When the magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, Out of Egypt I called my son.

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet: A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.

Song of Christmas: The brightness of your glory made itself manifest to the eyes of our mind by the mystery of the word made flesh. We are drawn to the love of things unseen through Him whom we acknowledge as God, now seen by mankind.

A Thought For the Day

Sunday This day He who Is, is Born; and He who is becomes what He was not.
Monday Mankind is a great, an immense family ... This is proved by what we feel in our hearts at Christmas.
Tuesday A God who became so small could only be mercy and love.
Wednesday Christmas is joy, religious joy, an inner joy of light and peace.
Thursday What is Christmas? It is the tenderness of the past, courage for the present, and hope for the future.
Friday May your soul, like a mystical bee, never abandon the little King and may everything within it be for Him.
Saturday Teacher of children became himself a child among children, that he might instruct the unwise. The Bread of heaven came down to earth to feed the hungry.

Gospel Lk 2:22-35: When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you prepared in the sight of every people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Christ is the Answer: We ourselves have this very deep certainty that Christ is the answer and that without the concrete God, the God with the face of Christ, the world destroys itself; and there is growing evidence that a deep rationalism, which thinks that human beings can rebuild the world better on their own, is not true.

On the contrary, without the restraint of the true God, human beings destroy themselves. We see this truth with our own eyes. We ourselves must have a renewed certainty: He is the Truth; only by walking in his footsteps do we go in the right direction, and it is in this direction that we must walk and I P.ad others. In all our suffering, not only should we face with certainty that Christ really is the face of God but should al so deepen this certainty and the joy of knowing it and thus be truly ministers of the future of the world, of the future of every person.

We should deepen this certainty in a personal relationship with the Lord because certainty can also grow with rational considerations. A sincere reflection that is also rationally convincing, but becomes personal, strong, and demanding by virtue of a friendship lived personally every day, with Christ, truly seems to me to be very important. **Pope Benedict XVI**

In His Will is Our Peace
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