

Christmas 2020

- We live in a particularly dark time don't we?
 - 2020 has been marked with...
 - record setting wildfires...hurricanes...civil unrest...
 - and of course...COVID-19...
 - let alone...the ongoing scandals in the Church.
 - And there were literally countless other unexpected tragedies...
 - that were commonly blamed on the year itself.
 - Dark times indeed!
- And yet...right now...so many people are full of hope...as this year comes to a close.
 - It's as if everyone...
 - is professing their common belief...
 - in the same exasperated breath:
 - *"2021 has got to be better!"*
 - And I believe that...
 - but not in the same way...
 - that most people have hope right now...
 - because...I believe...
 - that even if things get darker...
 - that Jesus Christ is drawing near.
- Today...at Christmas...
 - we do gather to profess our common belief...
 - in the only thing...
 - that can truly bring us hope...
 - that's Jesus Christ!
 - As St. John said of Him...in his Gospel:
 - *"Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."*
 - Or as the Prophet Isaiah said...in our first reading:
 - *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light..."*
 - We even see this contrast...between light and darkness...
 - on many of our favorite Christmas cards...
 - with Mary and Joseph...the angels and the shepherds...
 - all surrounded by darkness...
 - but from within that crib...
 - all their faces are aglow...
 - with a soft and radiant light.
 - And the great joy that they had in their hearts...
 - it helped to push that darkness back as well.
 - The Light was in the world...
 - He was with them!
 - But so few others...
 - were able to see...
 - as Christ Himself was drawing near.

- If we think about it...on the whole...
 - it actually got darker as Jesus came.
 - There was the slaughter of the holy innocents...
 - as Herod sought to destroy the newborn King...
 - and Joseph was forced to flee...
 - with the rest of the Holy Family...into Egypt.
 - And with rare exception...
 - like those whose lives...we read about in the Gospels...
 - that darkness continued...
 - for the rest of the world...
 - for the next 33 years!
 - In fact...during His passion and death...
 - when Jesus was doing His most important work of all...
 - dying for our sins...
 - it would have seemed...the darkest of all.
 - But looking back at it now...from our perspective...
 - wasn't it also...the greatest time of hope?
 - Because we know...that the Light of Christ...was about to explode...
 - through the power of the resurrection...
 - through the coming of the Holy Spirit...
 - in the early Church...
 - and out upon the whole world!
 - Just when the Light...seemed to be snuffed out...
 - a new...day...dawned!
 - *"Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."*
 - So for those of us who have faith...
 - the darkness is nothing to fear...
 - it simply means that Christ our Savior...
 - wants to draw near!
 - He wants to be with us!!
- And Jesus was just as much with Mary and Joseph...as He lay in that Creche...
 - as He was with Mary and John...at the foot of the Cross.
 - Both were profound moments of God's grace...
 - that helped enlighten our souls.
- But I think...given the choice...
 - most of us would choose to be with Jesus...
 - in the Creche...over the Cross.
 - That's why...traditionally...
 - so many more people come to church on Christmas day...
 - than come to church on Good Friday.
 - It's just so much easier to see the Light of Christ...
 - in those profound moments of...peace, joy and consolation...
 - but He's just as much with us...in our suffering and pain...
 - in fact...that's when He tends to do...His greatest good in our souls.

- So as you look back over your year...
 - where was Jesus inviting you...to join Him...at the Creche...
 - and where was Jesus inviting you...to join Him...at the Cross?
 - Did you accept His invitation?
 - Have you allowed Him to draw near?

- Because...He is with you...
 - as you gather with your extended family...for a great Christmas feast.
 - just as much as when you're eating...your Thanksgiving dinner...alone.

- He is with you...
 - when your health is good...and you remain COVID free...
 - but also when you're diagnosed with cancer.

- He is with you...
 - in those profound moments of prayer...that really set your heart on fire...
 - but also when your prayer is so dry and so arid...that you feel like giving up.

- He is with you...
 - on the joyous day of your wedding...
 - but also when you bury...your much beloved spouse.

- He is Emmanuel. He is with us.
 - And Jesus wants to draw even closer in 2021..
 - in our joys and sorrows...
 - our agonies or ecstasies...
 - and everything in between.
 - In that we can place our hope!