



CHRISTMAS - 2020

There is a story about two eighth grade students who told an old pastor what to say on Christmas Eve and how that event became a parish legend in a Church called the Nativity of Jesus. Just before midnight Mass, (which was actually at midnight) the 8th grade class was in a terrible state. The baby Jesus statue from the church's original crèche was missing. For 75 years, the 8th grade students entered in procession and 2 of them were chosen to be Joseph and Mary. Mary would carry the baby Jesus in her arms and place him in the manger before the Mass began. But this time, the baby Jesus was missing. The students and their teacher were all upset. They got hold of the pastor and asked him what they were supposed to do.

Just then, the two kids who were chosen to be Joseph and Mary came up with an unusual solution to the problem. They said to their priest, "Why don't we put all the communion hosts into a basket and carry that in procession to the manger right there in front of the altar. When you consecrate the bread, *the real Jesus will be* in the crib."

The pastor did what they asked him to do. The message from the two kids was easy for everyone to understand. The communion lines were longer than usual as they are on Christmas Eve and after communion a strange thing happened. The baby Jesus mysteriously appeared in the manger and to this day, no one knows when or how he got there. A true story.

We come from many different backgrounds and we probably don't agree on some things, but we do agree on this: the baby Jesus is no ordinary child. We believe He is the son of God. That's why we're here tonight, to celebrate his birthday and to remind everyone that all are welcome at the feast. Does that include LGBT people too? Yes, it does. And if it doesn't, it's not the church of Jesus. It's the church of someone else. There's a lot of that going around today.

Some people stay away from the church because they have been hurt by members of the church and sad to say, some of those doing the hurting have been priests - including priests in high places. People are not leaving the church (you are the church – you can't leave that), they are leaving an institution that is broken and because of corruption, can no longer fix itself.

Frank Sheed wrote these haunting words, "Many Catholics have misplaced their confidence, putting it in the hierarchy instead of Jesus. Then he says, "I am an expert on bad popes and the ugly side of the hierarchy but I am a very happy Catholic. There is nothing a pope or bishop could say or do that would make me want to leave the Church, but there is a lot a pope or bishop could do that would make me want him to leave."

We have a good bishop in our diocese. But he is not the reason for the season. We have many good priests and deacons in our diocese, but they are not the reason for the season. We have wonderful people in this parish, but none of them is the reason for the season.

The reason for the season is Jesus., the Son of God, the Savior of the world. He doesn't exclude anyone. He came to redeem all of us. He came to heal the brokenhearted, to heal wounded spirits. He came to teach us how to love - to love God, to love our neighbor and to love ourselves.

If you know someone who has left the church, please invite them to come back. The birthday celebration is not complete without them - and neither is the Church. For a few moments in silence, reflect on someone you know, who needs an invitation from you, to come back to the church. It is one of the best gifts you can give our Lord on his birthday.

Merry Christmas everyone.