December 25, 2019: The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus

Less than a year after I was ordained my Mom set up a trip to Italy and invited me to join in. (Well, honestly, she set it up particularly for me.) One of the destinations on this tour was the city of Florence, and one of the biggest attractions in Florence is Michelangelo’s sculpture of David. While we were walking through the main square we saw a replica of the statue, where the original resided until it was moved into the museum for protection. As I looked at the copy, it really did nothing for me. The thought that came to mind was, I don’t know what the big deal is about this replica—it is simply a nice sculpture. In time we made it to the museum where the original statue of David now resides. Honestly, the moment I looked at it, I had a hard time taking my eyes off of it. David almost looked like he was getting ready to breathe. The effect of this work of art on the human eye is in many ways beyond words. Pictures cannot do it justice. It is just one of those things you have to see in person.

In time I learned more about this work and Michelangelo. He said that he never carved a statue. Rather, the statue already existed in the block of marble. He simply chipped away at the marble until the work revealed itself. His job was not to make the marble something it was not, but rather, to discover what lay hidden beneath and to bring it to life.

In our own lives that is what God does for us. We are somewhat like that block of marble, and God will slowly chip away at us until over time our true selves are revealed. But the difference is that—unlike Michelangelo—God already knows what is to be revealed. He knows what lays beneath and ultimately what it is He is carving, and it is really the same statue for all of us. He wants to reveal Christ through us. He wants our lives to be Christ’s life personified. Each and every one of us is to become the living embodiment of Christ. But not one of us will be a copy; rather, each one will show Christ in our own unique way and through our own particular gifts and talents.

The gift of Christmas is not simply the birth of our savior. The gift of Christmas is not simply the birth of the God incarnate (Jesus being fully God and fully human). The gift of Christmas is not simply God’s gift of love and mercy revealed. The gift of Christmas is not simply the consummation of all God’s promises realized and revealed in Jesus. The gift of Christmas is all of these, but also about the fact that in Jesus’ humanity He shows us what it means to be truly human. He helps us to recognize that we can only truly embrace the fullness of our humanity when we live our lives in accord with the will of God. And to live our lives in any other way is not simply sin, but truly a rejection of our humanity.

The gift of Christmas is to help us recognize what God is trying to carve out of the marble that is us. The problem is that we get in the way of God’s work. We choose to act in ways that prevent God from continuing to mold and shape us. It is not that God could not force the issue; rather, God will never tamper with our free will. Instead He will patiently wait until we are ready for Him to continue the process. How does He help us get back to being molded by Him? He gives us the sacraments—particularly the Eucharist and Confession. The Eucharist is the fuel that energizes us to desire that God be seen through us. As we receive his true Body and Blood, we are strengthened by Christ to grow in relationship with Him and to desire to act as He did. Confession helps us to get back on track when we mess up. All the sacraments in their own way are intended to help us experience Christ and become more grounded in Him.

God’s ultimate goal is that we will recognize the truth of who we are. We are children of the one true King. We were created in his image and likeness, and He wants nothing more than for us to express the reality of how and why we were created. By being open to our true nature, we will not only find ourselves but we will find true joy, peace, hope, and love. And the unconditional love God has for us is revealed through the birth of his Son.

May you truly come to know the gift of Christmas. May you truly come to experience the reality that just as Jesus was God’s gift to the world, so are you—but obviously not in the same way. As God carves and molds your true, inner self—many times hidden through our own intransigence—He displays his handiwork to the world. God is not concerned with who we think we are: He is concerned simply with allowing his work to shine through you. He wants the world to see the person He created you to be. And, in that way we allow Christ to be experienced and revealed anew.

May you experience the gift of Christmas and truly become the gift of Christmas to others.

A very Blessed Christmas to one and all!
If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian