

## **Erasing the Margins**

Christmas (*Readings: At the Vigil Mass*)

December 25, 2019

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The former archbishop of San Salvador and now saint, Oscar Romero, said, “there is no longer a privileged people and a marginalized people. All of us are co-heirs in the mystery of Christ.” Archbishop Romero said this in the face of the situation in his country in the 1970s as the gap between rich and poor, with Catholics on both sides, reached unhealthy levels. The few rich families were the privilege people and the multitudes of those living in poverty were the marginalized people. In the archbishop’s mind, this was not consistent with the Gospel. While he offered pastoral care to Catholics on both sides, the Gospel was to be an equalizing force that would not recognize such a glaring injustice.

Today, we gather to celebrate Christmas. The message of Christmas isn’t ultimately one of gift-giving, holiday parties, decorations, or a vacation from work and school. Those are all nice additions of secondary importance. The ultimate message of Christmas is this: ‘Emmanuel, God is with us.’ In today’s Gospel from *Matthew*, we heard: “behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

By becoming one with us, God has broken-down all the barriers that divide us into the privileged and the marginalized. In this feast of the incarnation, God has done so by going to the margins. When Jesus entered into our humanity, he didn’t enter it from the top of society, but from the bottom. Our Lord was born in the poverty of a stable as a tiny baby. This child was like us in all things but sin.

As followers of Jesus Christ, and consistent with the pastoral vision of Pope Francis, we too are called to go to the margins. Expecting those on the margins to come to us will never happen. That is a way of protecting our privilege. It will not end the division. As the Jesuit priest Fr. Gregory Boyle says, we end the divisions by moving “closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased.” He continues: “we stand with those who dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away.” (*Tattoos on the Heart*, 190). In short, we must learn to recognize the human dignity of every person.

As the church of St. Matthias, our parish vision is to move towards the margins and stand with the marginalized. We hope that by doing so the divisions we experience everyday in society may cease, at least for a time while we are gathered in this sacred space.

*The message of Christmas is that God enters humanity through the margins, so we must be at the margins, too, ready to receive him.*

Do we stand with the marginalized?

This is our vision as a universal and local church. “For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch.”