

Fr. Mike's Christmas Message for online Mass

SCREEN: Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas again!

I'm so glad you joined us.

Indulge me for just a minute while I give a 'shout out' to some family and friends who are worshipping with us right now:

Merry Christmas Mom in Silver Spring.

Merry Christmas to my friends Cathy & Norm in West Virginia,

Phil in Ohio, and

Isabella & Liliana in Washington, DC.

It's been great worshipping with you online these past nine months.

My family and friends have been through some dark moments this year, but we've also experienced some rays of light -

like connecting through online worship.

When we couldn't get together in person we turned to technology - we overcame the barriers and obstacles that separated us.

I know the same is true for you, whether you live in Bowie, or on the other side of the country or even the other side of the world.

Technology has helped you connect with the people in your life at important moments, like weddings, baptisms or funerals.

Without the darkness brought on by the pandemic, these rays of light might not have happened.

It happened because you were determined to overcome the obstacles to be with others.

You were sending the message to your family and friends:

I'm with you and I love you.

And isn't that the message of Christmas?

God loved the world so much that he overcame incredible obstacles to be with his family.

Through a baby born in a manger in Bethlehem,
God literally broke through the heavens and took on flesh,
to say to all his children, “*I’m with you and I love you!*”

SCREEN: Emmanuel - God with us!

And this is what we celebrate today.

The name Emmanuel means, *God is with us*.

So whether this is your first time worshipping with us

or your first time in a while,

whether you found us on your own or someone invited you,

whether you consider yourself a “church” person or not,

I want you to hear this message: God is with you always

and doesn’t want anything to ever separate you from him.

God can break through any barriers or obstacles that

stand between you and his love for you.

One of the most powerful lessons in the Christmas story we just heard

is that God has a special love for those who consider themselves outsiders

and are treated as outcasts.

Think of it: in the Christmas story, who were the very first people

to hear the news that Jesus was born?

Shepherds.

Shepherds were rough, crude, and profane -

they were not permitted to worship in the temple.

They were true outsiders who were looked down on by everybody else.

And the shepherds at the first Christmas weren’t even the ‘A Team’;

they were assigned to the night shift.

And yet they were the ones God chose to

hear this announcement from the angel:

SCREEN: “behold, I proclaim to you

good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you

who is Christ and Lord.”

The shepherds must have asked themselves,

“Why tell us that the saviour has been born?

We’re nobodies.

Go tell the important people, the religious leaders.”

But shepherds are exactly the type of people that Jesus came for.

Outsiders and outcasts were more open to his message.

And it was such a simple message:

God hasn’t forgotten about you, God is with you and always will be.

It wasn’t a complicated message and neither were they.

The angel pointed the way and the shepherds

went to Bethlehem to see for themselves.

They saw and believed.

They saw and believed.

When we allow God to point the way for us,

we discover what our lives are all about - we find our meaning and purpose.

God also gives us strength to deal with life’s uncertainties.

This past year, these are all things we’ve found we need.

We’ve also learned that we need each other.

It’s how God made us - it’s part of our ‘hard wiring’:

God made us for each other.

In Jesus Christ, we find our way to God and others.

He is the Light of the World who dispels the darkness.

SCREEN: lit candle image

Today, right after communion we will sing Silent Night together.

And before we do, I will invite you to light a candle and

pass the flame to those around you.

Jesus taught his followers that sharing light is something they must do every day.

He said they must be bearers of hope and joy to people who are struggling -

people who may feel hopeless or stuck in the darkness of doubt or fear.

And really, this is something all of us can do.

We can share our light with others every day.

And any time we do, we experience a spark, a connection,
with God and others - we dispel the darkness around us.

As hard as 2020 has been, I am hopeful for 2021 because
of all the points of light I've seen here at St. Pius.

I've seen light in all of our parishioners who donated food, money, and time
to help those in our community who are hurting financially.

I've seen light in all our members who reached out to
family and friends and neighbors this year.

Maybe you're someone who is worshipping with us this Christmas
because someone in your life cared enough to invite you.

These are all signs of Christ working through his followers
to shine light and dispel the darkness.

Unlike the shepherds, you and I aren't going to get a vision of heavenly hosts
announcing God is here - we get other people.

99% of the time, that's how God makes his presence known,
that's how you and I see the light.

I've shared this quote before, but it is one of my favorites:

SCREEN: It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness

If you are looking for light this Christmas, turn to God and turn to others.

Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with you.

Jesus can heal any hurt you are feeling,

repair any brokenness, forgive any failure or shortcoming in your past.

Jesus can fill your life with light and hope.

Here at St. Pius we have some great ways that you can experience
the light of Christ in the new year.

And with technology, it's never been easier.

So no matter where you are, you can connect with us.

If you saw our prelude before Mass began,

you heard about some of the exciting opportunities coming in January.

SCREEN: Unstuck main screen

Next weekend as we celebrate Epiphany,

we begin a brand new message series - a preaching series at Mass - titled, Unstuck.

So much of what happened this year has us all feeling a little 'stuck' - unsure of where to go, what to do, and how to channel our energy and emotions. If that describes how you're feeling, I hope you will join us as we hear what God and scripture have to say about getting unstuck from whatever keeps us from making progress in life.

SCREEN: Alpha announcement screen

And another opportunity as we begin a new year is called Alpha. Alpha is a place where questions about God turn into a conversation about faith. A place to discuss doubts and explore the trickiest topics of faith - all with no pressure and no judgment.

It's designed for people who wouldn't necessarily describe themselves as church people.

A new session of Alpha will begin over Zoom on January 5th at 7:30 pm. And if Alpha isn't your next step, I'm guessing you know someone who could use a safe space like this to explore some of life's big questions. Invite them to check out Alpha.

SCREEN: Christmas image

At Christmas, God sent his son Jesus as the light of the world. So you and I don't ever have to curse the darkness. We can rejoice, knowing that today and every day, God is with us and will always, *a/ways*, love us. May you have a truly merry Christmas and a happy and hopeful new year. Amen. +