

Christmas Homily, December 25, 2020, 11:30 AM

There's a scene in the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life" which I think is one of the most powerful moments in the history of cinema.

SCREEN:



Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey is sitting in Martini's Bar and facing the lowest, most disastrous and desperate moment in his life. A substantial amount of money has been misplaced by his alcoholic uncle, and George is about to lose his business and his reputations. He's at the end of his rope, even saying hurtful things to his wife, his children and even his youngest daughter's teacher. And so he prays. Right there, in the bar, amidst the laughter, loud talk and music, he prays. "Dear Father in heaven. I'm not a praying man but if you're up there and you can hear me, show me the way. I'm at the end of my rope. Show me the way, God."

Jimmy Stewart was so at ONE with the character of George Bailey, his first role after his own military service in World War II, that he gave that scene all that he had, and could only do one take. He went beyond the script and his eyes filled with tears and he prayed to God to save him. What a powerful thing it is to pour out your heart to God at your most desperate moment, believing that in some way God will answer your prayer. God will save you. Of course, in the movie, God eventually does answer George's prayer by showing him what the world would have been had he never been born and enfleshing the truth that every single human being matters.

SCREEN:



When we pray we believe God is listening. We believe God understands because God became one like us and knows what it feels like to have a moment of desperation. And I suspect that ALL OF US have prayed as hard as George Bailey did many times throughout this year. We have all had those moments, when we can't see a way out of a difficult situation, a time when we are suffering, physically, spiritually or emotionally and it gets the better of us and we don't know where to turn, except to God, who literally pitched his tent among us and saved every aspect, every part of what it means to be human, including when we are at the end of our rope. The Word became flesh. The Word dwelt among us. The Word of God grew in wisdom and age and grace, and went through the cycles of life, the ups and downs, the fullness of what it means to be a human. To be one, like us.

The readings we heard this morning contain the Christmas story from Luke, the Christ child born in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. It tells us about how much God loves those who are weak and vulnerable. And God loves not just the people living in dire poverty and who hunger for food and for justice, not just those suffering in war torn countries, but God loves us too, all of us who are weak and vulnerable. Christmas is a time to stop and think about the manner, **the way** in which God chose to save us. All of us.

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.”

In our faith, the biggest mystery we have centers around the fact that God became a human being – God became one like us. God gave us this gift, JESUS CHRIST, to reveal just how much we are loved, and to tell us that we are loved and cared for without having to do anything in return. God gives us this gift, this grace freely and without condition. All we have to do is open our arms and accept it.

To understand what an extraordinary gift we're celebrating today – God becoming human, we first have to appreciate the mystery of what it means to be human ourselves and how our lives, **our being human** affects the lives of so many others, which is what George Bailey discovered in "It's A Wonderful Life."

The mystery of God becoming human, the Incarnation, Jesus Christ being born in a manger on Christmas day points to the mystery of who we are as creations of God, made in the image and likeness of God. Like a Christmas Present, the more we unwrap ourselves, the more we reveal who we are and open ourselves to change, the more we see that we're all the same, that we share a common spirit, that we each have a spark of God inside of us. The mystery of God becoming a human being may seem like a dream because it's hard to believe that we are loved that much, without any condition, without any strings attached. That we are loved for who we are, not for what we can do. Loved without any need to do anything, or to become what someone else wants us to be.

When we remember that, the sky's the limit and we can accomplish more than we ever imagined. That's what propels us to go out and do the things that Jesus attempted to do for others in his life: to be compassionate and caring and loving. The Christmas mystery is God embracing each person, each human relationship and all of creation with a powerful and transforming love.

Like George Bailey, we need God to show us the way - we can't make it on our own. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, as Isaiah prophesied. God sent Jesus into the darkness of our world to light our path. Jesus is the light of the world.

SCREEN: lit candle image

Sharing light is something followers of Jesus are called to do every day. Not only does it connect us to God, but it connects us to others. Sharing light and hope dispels the darkness of life. What fills me with hope this Christmas is that as dark as this year has been, we have seen so many points of light. We've seen light in health care and front line workers who sacrifice every day to bring hope and healing to the sick and dying. We've seen light in all the people who donated food, money, and time to help those who are struggling. We've seen light in all the ways we have connected with family and friends

and neighbors this year. Maybe the only reason you are here right now is because someone in your life cared enough to invite you.

That's Christ, the light of the world, working through them to shine a light in your life. If you are looking for light this Christmas, turn to God and turn to others. Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with you - wants to fill your life with light and hope every day, and any time you struggle.

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

SCREEN: Unstuck announcement screen

Next weekend, as we celebrate Epiphany, we are beginning a brand new message series - a preaching series at Mass - titled, **Unstuck**. Everything that has happened in 2020 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 the other opportunity we have 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.

Join us to experience the light of Christ this Christmas and every day of 2021. And have a happy, holy and blessed Christmas today and every day.

SCREEN: Merry Christmas