

Homily of Christmas, 2023

Isaiah 9:1-6, Psalm 96:1-3, 11-13; Titus:11-14; Luke 2:1-14

St. Paul writes, "We know that all things work together for good for them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). One of the most beautiful and most famous Christmas songs, "Silent Night" came about from a situation that went wrong.

The words of the song were written by a young priest in Austria, Fr. Joseph Mohr. On December 23, 1818, actors were to re-enact the story of Christ's birth in his church. Unfortunately, the church's organ was not working. For this reason, the actors presented the Christmas drama in a private home. Fr. Mohr, who was in a meditative mood after the event, instead of returning to his house immediately, decided to take a longer path to his house. The longer path took him up on a hill overlooking the village. From the hilltop he looked down on the peaceful snow-covered village. His mind went from the Christmas play he had watched to a poem he wrote a few years back about the night angels who announced the birth of the long-awaited messiah to shepherds on a hillside. Fr. Mohr decided that the words might make a good carol for his congregation the following evening at their Christmas Eve service. The church organist, Franz Xaver Gruber, helped him to compose a melody. Since the church organ was inoperable, Franz played the carol on a guitar (Story culled from Southern Nazarene University website).

The gist of the story is that had the church organ not broken down, the song, "Silent Night" may not have come into existence. Someone says, "the most beautiful things in our lives spring from broken things within ourselves." As we celebrate Christmas, as we come to the end of the year, and as we begin the new year, may we sing songs of joy from our brokenness. Amen.

Christmas celebration is the most festive time in the world. While Christians celebrate the commemoration of the birth of Jesus, the effects of the celebration are felt all over the world. The fact that the word 'Christmas' is on the lips of believers and non-believers is the reason Pope St. Leo the Great says, "No body is an outsider to this happiness. The same joy is common to all ..." This indeed is a fulfilment of the Scripture, "And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11).

The word 'Christmas' originates from the Latin phrase *Cristes Maesse*, meaning Christ's Mass. This is why we say that Jesus Christ is the reason for the season.

Every Christmas season brings back to me my Christmas childhood memories in the 1960s and 1970s. When Christmas approached, the children looked forward to new clothes and shoes, which we would wear to attend Mass on Christmas day. The new clothes and shoes were very precious to us. I still remember the excitement of the expectation of Christmas day and the joy of wearing my Christmas clothes and shoes. Christmas day meals were, also, special. From the month of September, children learned

and practiced new songs and dances for presentation to families, neighborhoods, market places, and so on, during Christmas season.

The newness Christmas brought was impressive and remarkable. Now, as an adult, my attention is no longer on new clothes, shoes, special meals, songs, and dances. Rather, my attention is on the spiritual newness the commemoration of the birth of Christ brings.

Mary and Joseph travelled 100 miles (161 kilometers), a four-day journey, on foot, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to register at the census, which was ordered by Quirinus, the Roman governor. Scripture tells us that there was no inn for them to lodge in. Therefore, they went to a shed on a farm where Mary gave birth to Jesus. "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). We pray for the grace of acceptance, perseverance, and thoughtfulness like Mary and Joseph.

Jesus was born in an animals' shed because human beings could not provide an inn for Mary and Joseph. The commemoration of the birth of Jesus is our opportunity to provide an inn for Jesus to be born again in our lives.

Christmas brings great beauty. Homes, churches, shops, offices, and streets are beautifully decorated with Christmas trees, wreaths, flowers, lights, and gifts. Since Jesus is the reason for the season, Christmas will have the best impact if our lives are spiritually decorated with hope, peace, joy, and love, which we celebrated during the four Sundays of Advent. Christmas will have the best impact if we give to others hope, peace, joy, and love as gifts.

Merry Christmas to you all.

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