

Homily of Christmas, 2024

Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1-6; Hebrews 1-6; John 1:1-14

The word 'Christmas' originates from the Latin phrase *Cristes Maesse*, meaning Christ's Mass.

Christmas celebration is the most festive time in the world. Andy Williams composed a Christmas song, which refers to the Christmas season as "the Most Wonderful Time of the Year." One of the lines of the lyrics says, "It's the hap-happiest season of all." 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 ..." Indeed, Jesus is the reason for the season! St. Paul writes, "And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11).

In 2004, Alan Gurney wrote a book entitled, *The Compass*, a Story of Exploration and Innovation. It is a story of a boat with the latest high-tech. In the morning, the boat set sail, guided by a sophisticated computer program. Everything progressed as programmed. On the first night, the open sea was moonless and starless. It was a night of total darkness. Then, the unexpected happened. Without warning, all the electronics on board failed. The screen went blank. It was a night with no moon or stars to serve as beacons, and no lighthouses in sight to guide the boat to a safe harbor. Another complication was that no one on board had thought to bring a simple compass that could have guided the boat to safety. The boat sailed blindly and tempest-tossed the whole night without any directional guides. However, there was a great sigh of relief when, in the early hours of the pitch-black morning, the dense clouds parted, and the North Star appeared in the heavens. The North Star guided them out of harm's way until the sun appeared. Then, the highly humbled crew returned the latest high-tech boat to the safe harbor. (From Archbishop George Leo Thomas' homily).

Recently, on March 26, 2024, a high-tech cargo ship, in the middle of the night, lost power and lost control. At about 1:28 AM, it crashed into Baltimore Key Bridge (1.6 miles/2.5-kilometer bridge), causing the collapse of the structure and the death of six bridge maintenance workers.

Revelations 22:16 refers to Jesus as "the Bright Morning Star" and Malachi 4:2 refers to him as "the Sun of Righteousness." The morning star is the brightest star in the night sky, which heralds the dawn and the end of darkness. As the Bright Morning Star, Jesus, is our hope and salvation. As the Sun of Righteousness, he is the light that dispels every darkness. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

The first reading of the midnight Mass says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone" (Isaiah 9:2). We have just read from St. John's Gospel, "What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:4-9).

Our high-tech world is not our hope and salvation, and not the light. High-tech world is good, but the results of high-tech without Jesus are high-tech lies, high-tech stealing, high-tech corruption, high-tech injustice, high-tech immoral life, high-tech wars and violence, and all kinds of high-tech evils.

St. John continues, “He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name” (John 1:11-12). Jesus is the light in our darkness. Without him, like the two ships, we lose control. Without him, we are lost. Without him, we are bound to crash and many times cause catastrophic destruction. But with him, we are back on track. He is our “Wonderful-Counselor” (Isaiah 9:6). He is our restorer. St. Peter writes, “The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ Jesus will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little. To him be dominion forever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10).

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; that he may light up, guide, restore, strengthen, and establish us. Fr. Mark Ameh, MSP, sings in his Christmas song, “Jesus, you are all I want for Christmas; more than presents wrapped beneath the tree.” A song by Fernando Ortega says, “Give me Jesus, you can have all this world.”

Christmas brings great beauty. Homes, churches, shops, offices, and streets are beautifully decorated with Christmas trees, wreaths, flowers, lights, and gifts. Christmas will have the best positive impact if our lives are spiritually decorated with hope, peace, joy, and love, which we prayed for during the four Sundays of Advent. Christmas will have the best positive impact if we give to others and receive from others hope, peace, joy, and love as gifts. Give someone hope! Give someone peace! Give someone joy! Give someone love! Receive hope! Receive peace! Receive joy! Receive love! If this exchange happens, Christmas is properly celebrated. If it does not happen, Christmas is not properly celebrated.

Merry Christmas to you all.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP