

Homily. Christmas 2020.

So this is Christmas, 2020 style. We've made it, despite this damnable pandemic ripping away from us our greatest Christian feasts of Easter and Pentecost earlier this year and threatening during these last few days to do much the same to our celebration of the Nativity of the Lord.

Having made it here what gifts does Christmas bring to us? What does the birth of our Lord offer to us? I believe that there are 2 gifts, 2 offerings for us from God. Both of them are vital for us if we're going to make it through the coming year. They are joy and hope, and to receive them we need look no further than the scene of the Christmas stable and crib.

Honestly, we're all thirsty for joy and where we'll drink of it best is in the simple, small things and with the ordinary people who populate our lives. In the birth of a new born child; in gatherings with our family and friends; in the freedom we have (remember that many don't) to come together and become the Church; in the gifts, cards, emails, FaceTime, Zoom chats and the phone calls we make to people we haven't seen or spoken to in ages. We'll get to fill up on the juice of joy in meals shared by lovers, companions and strangers; in our quiet times of reflection; in nature's beauty and savagery and in the stillness of God's company in prayer. The simplicity of the infant Christ-child lying in His manger tells us that if this is the best way for God to joyfully come amongst us, then it's certainly the most excellent way for us to find our joy every day.

But what of hope, that other Christmas gift to us from God? Once again, we need to look to the Christmas stable scene. Yes, a humble stable out

the back of a lodging house in that small, insignificant town of Bethlehem some 2000 years ago. It tells us that we won't find our hope in high places, or at least the sort of hope that sustains us for very long, the true, lasting type of hope. No, for real hope we don't look to the machinations and manoeuvrings of politics, nor to the great global affairs happening in the halls of power. One day they, too, will pass away into dust and ashes. Rather, we seek our hope in the simple routines and relationships that give meaning and purpose to us in the bad times as in the good.

Our real hope is found in our families and with our friends. It's found in our efforts and work to keep being involved in the life of our local Parish and Church; in the way that we try to help the less fortunate, befriending the lonely and the stranger. Enduring hope is discovered in the simple courtesies of our dignified daily living and in the ordinary but really quite extraordinary courage we display when facing adversity or being struck down by forces beyond our control. Just as a stable out back of an Inn was the first home for God with us, so, too, hope is seen and felt by us off the beaten track where few but us would ever go looking.

Finally then, thank you for beating the odds during this most broken of years. Thank you for coming here together to create our Church and be the Body of Christ for each other. Jesus is the new born Prince given to us. It's He who refreshes our joy and shows us the way to live in hope day by day. So, thank you God for this most perfect and wonderful gift.