

## CHRISTMAS DAY MASS 9 AM

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-6 [ from Mass during the Night]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96 [from Mass during the Night]

Response:

"Today our Savior is born! Today our Savior is born! This is the day, this is the day, Christ, our Savior is born!"

Second Reading: Titus 3:3-7 [from the Mass at Dawn]

Alleluia Verse:

"I proclaim good news of great joy/ Today a savior is born/

Christ the Lord, the true light of the world." [Night/Day]

Gospel: John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18 [From the Mass during the Day]



Yes, I do have a song: [Violin music]

That's a Taizé chant with different sets of words in several languages.

The one I heard first was:

♪ *O Poverty, source of riches, Jesus, Son of God, born in Bethlehem* ♪

That is based on a verse from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter of Paul to the Corinthians. He writes, "You know the grace shown you by our Lord Jesus Christ: how for your sake he made himself poor though he was rich, so that you might become rich by his poverty." [2 Cor 8:9]

In the first reading we heard that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. And hasn't 2020 been a year of walking in darkness & in many ways, still is. But we, God's people, who walk in darkness will see a great light. We'll get a glimpse today of the light of Christ.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading we are reminded that the love of God comes to us through our baptism as a pure gift, not something we earn by being good; And in the Gospel the good news is that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it; the wonderful news that the Word became flesh & dwelt among us, and **dwells** among us.

But we can get so caught up in the parties, shopping, family gatherings and decorations of the Christmas season - or even in the difficulties of this time in the world - we can get so caught up that we can forget the rest of the Gospel story: that Jesus came as the child of a *poor* family, forced to leave their home by an oppressive government, born among animals and laid in a manger, a feeding trough for sheep and cows.

To receive the glorious Good News that the Son of God has become a human baby & has entered totally into our human condition; to receive the wonderful & mysterious message of Christmas - we need to be hungry for it. Some of those in Jesus' own time did not accept him because he came as someone they really didn't expect. They expected a warrior, who would wipe out those rotten Romans. He came in peace, as a poor child. We need to live the beatitude, Blessed are the Poor in spirit -

That is, "Blessed are those who know their need for God."

A great bishop gave a homily on Christmas Eve in 1978, over 40 years ago, two years before he was murdered at the altar, in El Salvador because he dared to call his people to live the Gospel, including the soldiers who were carrying out the government oppression & murder. He was canonized in 2018 by Pope Francis. His name is St. Oscar Romero, and these are the words of the homily he preached:

*"No one can celebrate a genuine Christmas without being truly poor. The self-sufficient, the proud, those who, because they have everything, look down on others, those who have no need even of God - for them there will be no Christmas. Only the poor, the hungry, those who need someone to come on their behalf, will have that someone.*

*That someone is God, Emmanuel, God-with-us.*

**WITHOUT POVERTY OF SPIRIT THERE CAN BE NO ABUNDANCE OF GOD."**

I think that during the past year, we have all been given a taste of poverty by a raging pandemic & an uncertain economy. We all know someone who has gotten sick or even died, even if our families haven't been touched directly. And others in our world have tasted oppression, as Jesus did, simply because of their race or ethnic background. We have seen their stories on TV, or know someone who has suffered in this way. Many who had been comfortable and in control of their lives have become hungry and unemployed. We were even flooded on Christmas.



A Christmas Day flood in Middleburgh

We hear the story of Christmas every year - in Scripture, in Carols, in stories about people serving each other & feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless healing the sick & accompanying the dying. And in this parish community, not only the Joshua project but many hidden acts of service have enriched so many, and drawn them into deeper relationship and connection with the people of the parish, and with God.

But to really enter into the mystery of Jesus we need to challenge & abandon the way of thinking common to so much of our world. The kind of thinking that can be called dualistic, a kind of "either/or" judgment, "us and them", that reduces reality to what we can understand with our minds.

We say we believe that Jesus is both human and divine. We say it in the creed, we say it in so many different ways, but we often fall into thinking of him as **either** an extraordinary human **or** a god pretending to be like us. Sometimes we make him so divine in our minds that we push him out of our reality and forget that we are called to walk in his footprints, to live as he lived.

We can begin to experience Christ as BOTH God and human as we grow in our faith and love. I often fall back into either/or thinking. I want you to change things, Lord. But I hear him answer, "That's your job, Peter." This requires the humbling admission that we will never come fully to understand what it means, that Jesus both God and human but we can enter the mystery of the incarnation and begin again to look at the world and each other & ourselves with a "both/and" vision.

The chant I began with describes poverty as a source of riches. What? You've got to be kidding! How is that possible? How can poverty & suffering be BOTH a cross & a grace? Well to know how that can happen, we can look to Jesus, himself, because his choice to come into our world in poverty has made us rich by the grace of God. His love led him to the cross, & became a gift of life for us. That's what we are celebrating at this Eucharist.



That's OK for him, but what about us? How can poverty be a source of riches for us?

The experience of need has led to new relationships all over the world & called forth love and service from many - I think of the chef who has managed to organize restaurants to help feed those who have lost their jobs, & in the process enabled them to stay open & giving their staff the ability to keep their jobs. That is a great and wonderful thing. And even children have reached out to other children to make sure there were gifts at Christmas.

I was thinking this morning that the necessity of wearing a mask is an expression of love for you, for others, so I don't inadvertently infect someone else. But it's a cross, I don't like it & you probably don't either. It's really nice when our charity, our reaching out to others makes us feel good. It's not so easy when our reaching out in love is inconvenient for us. And sometimes it makes me light headed when I'm in the supermarket. I feel like I want to breathe again. That is how poverty and the richness of love go together.

Even the experience of racism & violence has brought people of all races together to protest & to work for justice, to reach out in love.

I know I have been blessed with new relationships which have enriched my life, and the deepening of relationships I already have. [I wish so many of them weren't with doctors, chiropractors & pharmacists]

The forced isolation for the sake of protecting others has included separation from family & friends & my own Franciscan Fraternity. I can't even visit my brothers at Siena, in order to keep them safe, and keep myself safe as well. But it has led to creative ways of communicating and praying with each other. We have a prayer meeting by conference call every week & have begun to use zoom & YouTube to share our faith.

The poverty of this time has been a source of the richness of a deeper relationship with God. Deacon Gary talked about that yesterday at the Christmas Eve Mass. It has also led to a deeper relationship with my own spirit. Prayer has become as important as eating. I also have a deeper awareness of my connection with the hungry, lonely & oppressed.

There is another set of words for the chant I began with:

♪♪ *O Poverty, source of riches, Jesus, grant to us one heart with the lowly.* ♪♪

The same chant in French ends with the words, "Un Coeur de pauvre" A heart of poor & in Spanish, "Alma de pobre." A soul of poor. Very difficult to translate, let alone fit to the music.

They imply BOTH solidarity with the poor, an **experience** of my own poverty without God AND a heart for the poor, a readiness to see myself in someone who is poor because I share, in some small way, their experience.

This time can be an opportunity to extend the Christmas Spirit beyond one season. A chance to see ourselves as connected to the whole human race and to go beyond any kind of "us & them" thinking or behavior, which is where our minds go very often, especially when it comes to forgiveness.



We are celebrating the Eucharist tonight, the way St. Francis celebrated it at midnight in the little town of Greccio in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. With animals & ordinary people, using a rock as an altar, an event that led to the custom of a Christmas creche, stable & manger, like the one at OLV. The altar is in a way our manger, the place where **we** come to be fed with the body and life of Christ. And when we take Communion, we are given the power to become what we eat.

That is what Christmas is all about - getting to know Jesus so well that we can see him in each other - and especially those who are sick or in need or different or even unpleasant to be with - getting to know him so well that we can be his presence for the world.

♪♪ O Poverty, source of riches, Jesus, Son of God, born in Bethlehem ♪♪

Video of Christmas Day Mass

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOHIt3MoQDk&t=23s> Christmas Day, Part 1 [to middle of homily]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErjYH9EjP1s&t=16s> Christmas Day, Part 2 [from last part of the homily to Communion] The break comes in the middle of these words:

They imply BOTH solidarity with the poor, an **experience** of /my own poverty without God AND a heart for the poor, a readiness to see myself in someone who is poor because I share, in some small way, their experience.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Reading for Christmas Mass 2020

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9:1-6 - Night)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shown.  
You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing,  
As they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils.  
For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder,  
And the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.  
For every boot that trampled in battle, every cloak rolled in blood,  
will be burned as fuel for flames.

For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests.  
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.  
His dominion is vast and forever peaceful,  
From David's throne, and over his kingdom,  
which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this!

The Word of the Lord.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading for Christmas Mass 2020

A Reading from the Letter of Paul to Titus

Beloved:

When the kindness and generous love of God our Creator appeared,  
he saved us, not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy.  
God saved us through the baptism of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.  
God lavished this Spirit on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, that we might be justified by God's grace  
and become heirs, in hope, of eternal life. You can depend on this to be true.

The Word of the Lord

(Titus 3:4-8, from the Mass at Dawn)

## Gospel for Christmas Mass 2020

The Beginning of the Holy Gospel according to John

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He was with God in the beginning.

All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.  
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.  
He was in the world, and the world came to be through him,  
but the world did not know him.  
He came to his own, but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him he gave the power to become children of God. These are the ones who believe in his name - who were born not by natural generation, nor by human desire nor by human choice, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we saw his glory,  
the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Of his fullness we have all had a share -  
grace following upon grace.  
For while the law was given through Moses,  
this enduring love came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God.  
It is the only Son, who is at the Father's side,  
who has revealed God to us.

The Gospel of the Lord (John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18)