

HOMILY FOR CHRISTMAS 2019 year A: Vigil Mass

The children in our midst are an open window into the mystery of Christmas. Both Christians and people of other beliefs or none, exchange gifts at Christmas. For all the commercial necessity that has attached itself to the giving of gifts, the one who receives a gift with pleasure and thanks is reliving the innocence of their childhood. A child's frank and expectant statement of 'what I want for Christmas' comes from a mystery at the heart of her existence, the mystery of desire.

Desire comes from our need to reach for the stars. The word means 'to take from the stars', it speaks of our unavoidable experience of incompleteness, which we seek to fill from the awe inspiring presence of the firmament above us. But in vain.

A child's expectancy and a child's delight are a parable spoken to us that we should seek only what truly satisfies. Soon, the child will need to repeat the cycle of desire, Hopefully, he will learn where his desire can find peace.

A carol popular in Italy sings of Jesus, 'who comes down from the stars'. The carol illuminate why the Wise Men looked to a star to lead them to the Saviour. A parishioner wrote on her card this year, "we are like the three wise men who followed the star. I pray that we too will one day find Jesus."

Well, lest our seeking goes astray, the Son of God has come to find us. The letter to Titus assures us that "God's grace has been revealed." By taking our human nature to himself, the Son of God has united himself with us so that we can unite ourselves with him.

In the words of the Italian carol, 'you came to an icy cold cave. You, creator of the world, want for clothing and warmth.' Only once we tremblingly acknowledge how much we lack do we appreciate the magnitude of the gift.

Yet, driven by desire we reach for what is less – plastic, gold, flattery, control, ego.

The greek god of desire, Eros, before whom our world has always willingly bowed down, is the antithesis of godliness. Ever seeking greater satisfaction, Eros betrays its limitation. Eros always signifies that something is lacking.

But Isaiah proclaimed “the jealous love of the Lord of Hosts”, God desires us mightily. Isaiah calls God, ‘Might Counsellor, Eternal Father.’ Our Father wants our children’s unfeigned, confident desire to arouse in us desire for our true good. From a newborn’s first shrill cry to her latest list for Santa, a child speaks desire with honesty. Her cry shouts, “I need sustenance, intimacy, warmth, love”. Does my desire, when I become adult, reach for the stars as a child does or does my desire stop at something counterfeit or delusory?

Christmas celebrates the fact that God has become a human being to reveal to us that our desire for authentic happiness is not in vain. The infant saviour has entered our existence to fill up our desire. Can I allow my desire to carry me beyond what finally does not satisfy, to carry me to the infant who comes down from the stars?

Children, make sure you visit the Christmas Crib tonight before you leave. See how Jesus lived among other people like you and me.

Parents, in the car tonight, let your child tell you how they are able to experience God’s love at Christmas; help them unmask their deepest desiring; see if they can tell you what thanks are in their heart for the gift of Jesus; help them with words that speak their thanks for this gift; join with them, build up their faith, interpret for them since you know better than anyone the reasonings of your child’s heart.