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Homily at Christmas – 25 December 2019

A little girl in England discovered a cry for help as she was writing out Christmas cards in recent days. It was a message from some prisoners in a Chinese jail. She and her dad passed on the card to an amnesty group.

In one Christmas card I received some friends included a bookmark with a short explanation of the Christmas candy cane. Held in your hand with the crook upwards it speaks of Jesus our Shepherd. Held the other way, the 'J' suggests the name of Jesus himself. The red stripes speak of his saving blood and the stripe on his back from the scourge. The white speaks of his holiness and his humanity.

A writer in one of the newspapers took up his calculator and added up the numbers 1-12 from the Christmas song "On the First Day of Christmas my true love gave to me ...". "By the time you add up 1 partridge, 2 turtle doves, 3 french hens and all the rest you arrive at 364. That's one number less than the days of a typical year. Is the song writer suggesting that there is one great gift still to come?"

Today is the one day in the year – 1 out of 365 – that we open our arms to receive this great gift – the best gift of all – the gift of the Father's true love, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Our exchange of gifts seeks to imitate this one great gift. Our greetings to one another, our best wishes of peace, joy, love: all of these wishes are prayers for others, a prayer of blessing. The well known story of the German and Allied soldiers who climbed out from their trenches at Christmas during World War I speaks to us of the common humanity we share, our sense of the futility of war, our universal desire for a world where everyone on earth can live in freedom, peace, safety, without war, hatred, conflict.

The author of the Old Testament Book of Wisdom 18:14-15 somehow speaks about Christmas when he writes:

“When peaceful silence lay over all,
and night had run the half
of her swift course,
down from the heavens,
from the royal throne,
leapt your all-powerful Word ...”

This is what we celebrate today: God leaping into our needy world, leaping into our lives, leaping into your heart and mine, leaping into our homes as we share the joy of Christmas in our families. Pope Benedict often spoke of the Trinity looking down on us, and God the Father expressing a sigh and a heartfelt plea, “who will rescue this people, our own creation ... who will bring them the love of my heart ...?” And, Pope Benedict says, the Son cries out “I will” and quickly runs to be with us, to embrace our humanity, to pour out himself – even his blood to the last drop – on the Cross.

Friends, looking at the Christmas Crib we see the Almighty Lord who has leapt down, who has run to our rescue, who has become a man with us and for us. This is the Father’s one great gift on this great and wonderful day.

Come, let us adore him!