

Dec. 25 (Christmas Day)

Isa.52:7-10

Heb.1:1-4

Jn.1:1-14

Let us pray: O Word who became flesh, you linked creation and redemption, and in the course of your deepest solidarity with us you experienced rejection. Yet you as our light and life assure us that darkness cannot prevail in our struggle, thus giving us the best Christmas gift to which may we trust and proclaim in joy. Amen.

Merry Christmas! When we greet each other 'Merry Christmas', have we ever cast our mind to how this greeting based on one of the deepest divine mystery can be most authentic and heart-felt? Whilst the western world in which we live now offers us limited space in authentic celebration of Christmas in contrast to Holiday greetings, how do we live out 'no fear in love' as we extend the most heart-felt Christmas greetings to people around us: loved ones, friends, acquaintances and mere sojourners alike?

We get a glimpse on how St. John did so from our Gospel Reading today. There, St. John started unapologetically to name Christmas as the occasion on which 'the Word became flesh'. There, we heard the familiar Gospel saying that 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him . . . What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. . . John . . . came . . . to testify to the light . . . The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.'

Unlike St. Luke the evangelist, from whom we heard last night, depicting Christmas with empirical details on the birth of Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem with God's glorious light shining while angels and heavenly hosts sang, here we heard St. John calmly made his proclamation through his cosmic and philosophical lens to this great holy mystery of Christmas as 'the Word becoming flesh to bring life and light to our darkness'.

Whilst St. Luke's chosen genre on Christmas for his crowd is probably more familiar to us, St. John's broad-stroke approach sometimes can invite our attention for Christmas to a greater depth. Questions may start to emerge despite the familiarity of Christmas to us. Why would Jesus as the Word of God choose to participate both in creation and redemption? Can creation and redemption be linked, instead of our general inclination of not looking at the two of them together? As our minds start moving towards that direction, we may likewise be intrigued to notice that, in creation comes light and darkness in form of day and night which actually turns the chaos before creation into order. So we may wonder whether Jesus as the true light who enlightens everyone has the same effect in redeeming the chaos in people's lives.

Truth be told, such contemplation about Jesus' incarnation can be more helpful to our attempt to have a deeper appreciation of the Holy mystery of Christmas, than our simply following the nativity story as depicted by St. Luke and St. Matthew.

And so, today as we celebrate Christmas with Jesus coming as life and light for us, the sense of peace, hope, joy and love speak more realistically to us in our daily encounters and scenarios.

Recently the parish has been undergoing our routine (once-a-decade) event of getting up-dated photos of us as individuals and families in the parish to compile a parish pictorial booklet. We

happened to have missed it in the decade before, so we're now actually doing a 'two-decades' update. Thus, for a little while, I had the opportunity of looking back at how a lot of our babies and young people who got baptized in the past have grown up so much that their previous photos we had are far from being close enough for us to recognize them as compared to their up-dated photos now. It therefore avails me to have an overview of different transitions in life for us as individuals, families and parish over the past two decades.

It is of course a good cause for celebration as we see young people growing up, with some of them even starting their own families. Yet we all know that transitions often aren't easy or smooth-sail all the time. For transitions all bring with them changes (if not challenges) and we, often as creatures of habit, tend to hang onto certainty in life instead of responding to changes, and so we often don't respond well to changes in life. Instead, we may respond with denial, neglect, and more often by exercising our will of flesh to go our preferred direction instead of a wise and appropriate direction as willed by God.

So, it is no mere co-incidence to hear from our Gospel Reading today on how St. John said about Christmas as birth of Jesus into the world: 'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him . . . he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of . . . the will of the flesh or . . . of man, but of God.'

As we think about it, St. John's statement of 'Jesus' coming to his own people (i.e. people who came into being through creation), his own people did not accept him' is a sad but tremendously true depiction of our reality in life. Whilst St. John is also pointing to Jesus' being rejected by the Jewish officials, such saying of St. John fits well even with the world for the following 2,000 years. Let us look at our contemporary world: climate changes with wildfire, draught and famine, flooding and global warming, autocratic dictatorship diminishing value and dignity of lives, war-torn places producing innumerable migrants and refugees. . . Aren't human beings rejecting Christ's bringing life and light to the world? Aren't human rejection to Christ' redemption of the chaos in people's lives obvious? Aren't our grip on certainty as defined by ourselves leading us to let go of what God has in store for us in terms of peace, joy, hope and love as we live in faith (i.e. in accepting and believing in Christ)?

In our Christmas celebration here, our Readings remind us that we need not despair though, even in view of such disastrous human conditions on earth. For the coming of Christ is about the good news of peace and salvation, like what we heard from our First Reading today: 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation. . . Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem . . . and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.'

As regard this 'good news of salvation' for human as 'ruins' of what God created us to be (just like 'ruins of Jerusalem for the ancient Israelites'), was all made possible with Jesus taking on blood and flesh so as to come to us as his people and eventually made it possible for all to live in peace, joy, love and hope because of his salvation through his death and resurrection.

It is such glorious and excellent good news, like what we heard from our Second Reading today: ‘. . . in these last days [God] has spoken to us by a Son . . . through whom he also created the world. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he has sustained all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become . . . superior to angels . . .’

That’s right. In this human condition of ‘ruins’, what better news can we have than Jesus’ coming to us to let us see the reflection of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s very being, as we can get saved from the ruins of creation, including human lives. That calls to mind a piece of BBC on-line video news which I watched not too long ago. It was about China working on repairs of the ruins of the Great Wall by first sending drones to fly up above the Great Wall to take aerial pictures of the ruined parts of the Great Wall. Then experts worked on the gathered material and information to figure how to repair each individual portion of the ruins by noting the exact measurement, assessing the respective challenges because of the steepness of the slopes on which the Great Wall stands as well as the height of the mountains ranges on which the Great wall had been built thousands of years ago. After all these careful work on the collected information and the coming up with detailed plans for restoration of the ruins, workers started heading up the Great Wall on the mountains by foot, using stones to be quarried along their way near to the various sites of ruins, using donkeys to carry those stones and other building material and tools to do the specific repairs at different parts of the Great wall, so that the wall can be saved before the forces of weathering takes its toll.

So, in a similar fashion, Christmas reminds us that Christ came to the world and to all therein which came into being through him. Yet part of creation including human beings got turned into ruins over time, like the Great Wall, something which may not be even obvious to us until we send drones to fly high enough (or in our case, dig deep enough) to be able to survey the ruins. And the good news of Christmas is that we can count on the Son of God becoming Son of Man to sustain us by his word, and he had made purification for sins to redeem our crumbling. So today we celebrate this great holy mystery of Christmas as ‘the Word becoming flesh to bring life and light to our darkness’ and to redeem our ruins in life (individually and corporately).

That way, we can be confident to walk on, Christmas after Christmas, to embrace life with transition and challenges in a healthy manner: letting go of fear, denial and neglect, but honestly embracing life through Christ’s sustenance for us in peace, joy, hope and love, as we walk on in faith, believing so as to receive Christ and all that Christ gives us.

And so, we can greet each other today with the authentic and heart-felt greeting of ‘Merry Christmas’ – God be with us all!

Let us pray again: O Word who became flesh, you linked creation and redemption, and in the course of your deepest solidarity with us you experienced rejection. Yet you as our light and life assure us that ruins and darkness cannot prevail in our struggle, thus giving us the best Christmas gift to which may we trust and proclaim in joy. Amen.