

December 25, 2013 Christmas Homily

My brothers and sisters - some forty years ago a message appeared on many billboards across the country. The message was not an especially cheerful one- it was downright gloomy. And the message read "Now is not the time to bring a child into the world." Forty years ago you may recall there was concern about overpopulation. And many scholars warned about the consequences of the world's overpopulation. But that very same message was heard during other periods - the time of the First World War, the period of the Great Depression, World War II, the nuclear war threat. Remember the Cuban missile Crisis? Some of you are old enough to remember the Cuban Missile crisis, Vietnam, the energy crisis of the 1970's. And you would hear the same mantra – the same words – NO. Now is not the time to bring a child into this world. It is too dangerous. Why would you subject the child to such misery?

Now I want to quote to you from the English historian Paul Johnson's recent book – "Jesus – a biography from a believer". In Chapter One he writes the following words. "The world into which Jesus was born was harsh, cruel, violent and unstable. It was also materialistic and increasing wealthy." It sounds very much like our world today, doesn't it? But consider the eternal God entered our world - the one who is God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God. He is emerged from the inexpressible light in which He dwells. He has entered our history. God has appeared as a child. But why? "Now is not the time to bring a child into this world." Why?

We are given some hints in John's Gospel. First hint –from chapter 3 –"God so loved the world that He gave His only son". Now what does that mean? It means that each one of us, His creation is an object of God's love, compassion, affection, and mercy. We are His creation. And as we read in the first chapter of John, "All things were made through him." That is the eternal word. And without him nothing came to be. "And the word became flesh and dwelled among us."

Now some of you may remember Alfred Hitchcock. Does anyone here remember Alfred Hitchcock? About Jack Madden's age now, I think. Does anybody remember what was peculiar about each one of Alfred Hitchcock's films? There was something, a novelty, in each one of his films. Does anyone know what it was? He was always in it. He always made a cameo appearance in each one of his films. And if he failed to do so his legion of fans would have been disappointed. Now, remember the film was his work: his masterpiece! So he said "What the heck? I am going to make myself part of the film." And that's exactly what God has done. He has created us and said "Why not? Why not, that I should not be part of this good creation of mine?" "And the word became flesh and dwelled among us."

The second reason for the mystery of Christ's birth: In the 18th chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus is interrogated by Pontius Pilot. Remember this was shortly before He died. And Pontius Pilot put this question before Jesus. Where are you from? Where are you from? And then Jesus spoke on His mysterious origin and purpose saying "It was for this reason I was born, and for this reason I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth". And remember Pilot's sarcastic reply, "What is truth?" He could be living today! What is truth? Who was not beyond truth. You have no right to impose your views on me. We live in an age of relativism, indifferentism and atheism. So why does Jesus come? Because we have lost our way, with no direction. We are aimless. The second reason why our Lord came is so that we might follow him regardless of the consequences.

Now a third reason. And this should be geared to all of us. The Lord wants to be near to us. You know, there is a lot calling us out there. A lot of unhappy people! A lot of people who struggle, in particular over the holidays. Christmas is not a joyful time for them. It is a time of sadness. But the Lord opens His arms to accept us and says I am here for you, for your life. I am here to give you a hand, to help you. Because I want you to be happy. He is near to us. And this is particularly true when we contemplate the mystery of the Eucharist.

St Augustine, that brilliant Bishop and theologian-brilliant!-recognized an important truth about Bethlehem. Bethlehem means "House of bread" in Hebrew. Now where was our Lord laid? Does anybody know? In a manger! And what is a manger? It is a feeding bin for animals. And the One who is in the manger, our Blessed Lord, would later identify himself in the Gospel of John as "the bread of life". The One who is in the manger is the one who is going to feed us. How many feeding stories are there in the whole Bible? And He is going to feed us. He is going to nourish us. He is going to remind us of His presence. He is going to raise us up, all those who are despairing, in the dumps, in the doldrums. He is going to raise us up because He is here. And that is the Good News.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, we thank our heavenly Father who gave us our Lord. The words on that bill board, "Now is not the time to bring a child into the world" are so foreign to the Christian mentality - so foreign, so despairing, so idiotic. But we gather here today because we believe in Jesus Christ. The Eternal Word made flesh. God has appeared as a child. Let us rejoice this night and fully appreciate why God came 2000 years ago. He was laid in a manger, a Bethlehem manger. And why He continues to make His presence in this church in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Remember, the word "Christmas" is derived from the Mass of Christ. The old English word is Christ Mass, the Mass of Christ. And that is why we are here today. Reflect on the Good News.

Rejoice in the news of our Savior's birth. And say "poopoo" to all of those who give us despairing news about this not being the time to bring a child into this world. The Child is God's gift. The Child is Jesus Christ.

Amen.