

December 25, 2015 Christmas Homily:

My brothers and sisters, it is surely worth noting that some of the most beloved Christmas stories that we see every year on television feature a villain, whose sole objective is to dampen our spirits and steal away our joy. Perhaps the best known of the killjoys are Ebenezer Scrooge of Charles Dicken's A Christmas Carol ("Bah humbug"), The Grinch who stole Christmas, the prosecuting attorney Thomas Mara in Miracle on Thirty-fourth Street, who put Santa Claus on trial and the heartless Old Man Potter in It's a Wonderful Life. Ultimately, they all failed. The sentiment of Christmas joy is too powerful to be suppressed, even by those who are hell bent on dismissing the Eternal Word made flesh, Christ the Lord, and turning a holy day into another secular holiday! We Christians sing "Joy to the World"...And why? Because, "The Lord is come"! If the Lord is our joy, our joy cannot be taken away!

In one of his Christmas sermons Pope Francis writes: "The joy of the gospel is for all people... no one can be excepted. That is what the angels proclaimed to the shepherds;" "Be not afraid, for behold I bring you news of great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the City of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:10-11).

With gratitude we also recall the words of one of the great popes of the early church, Pope Leo the Great: "Today our savior is born; let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life... the fear of death has been swallowed up; life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness. No one is shut out from this joy; all share the same reason for rejoicing."

Bear in mind that the birth of the Messiah was the moment that Israel had been awaiting centuries for... and waiting through many dark hours. What Isaiah prophesied long ago had been fulfilled on that Holy Night: "A child is born for us, a Son is given us" (Is. 9:6) The Lord is here. From this moment in time, God... Emmanuel... is truly with us. He has entered our world. He is close to us. We have every reason to be jolly, to be "joyful and triumphant". But let us not confuse Christmas joy with the shallow, passing pleasures of our natural life. Joy, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, reaches into the very depths of our souls. Christmas joy trumps everything, even our darkest moments in life!

A riveting testimony to the truth of Christian joy may be found in one of the most joyless and God forsaken places on the face of the earth: Auschwitz, the notorious Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War. It was, and continues to be, a place of horrors. Yet, in one of the starvation bunkers in that hellish place, the mortal life of a Franciscan, Fr. Maximillian Kolbe, was slowly ebbing away. In the bunker, the prisoner could be heard singing Polish hymns and Christmas carols! The guards must have found his singing to be unsettling, to say the least. "What madness", they must have cried. But such is the logic of Christian joy, a merriment that defies all of our natural expectations.

In every age, attempts will be made to diminish the good news and rob us of our joy. Today the killjoys are the enemies of religion, secular progressives, terrorists, and merchants who refuse to acknowledge the feast of Christmas. Ultimately, like the villains in the popular Christmas stories on television, they are doomed to failure... you simply cannot extinguish the light that has been kindled on Christmas Eve.

Merry Christmas!