

December 25, 2017 Christmas Homily: “A Charlie Brown Christmas” is surely one of the most popular entertainments of the holiday season. First televised in 1965, the animated feature has been seen by millions of viewers over the past fifty-two years. As the story unfolds, we see Charlie Brown downcast and miserable. Deeply sensitive to the true meaning of Christmas, he is appalled by the rampant commercialism and worldliness of the season leading up to the day of the feast. His friend and amateur psychiatrist, Lucy, is concerned about his state of mind, and suggests that he direct a neighborhood Christmas play. Charlie takes up her offer. However, things go from bad to worse when he purchases a pathetic looking Christmas tree. Not surprisingly, he is teased unmercifully for his inexcusable blunder.

In the auditorium where the play is to be performed, Charlie Brown cries out in a tone of despair, “What is Christmas all about? Does anyone have an answer?” His timid friend and Lucy’s younger brother, Linus, is convinced he knows the answer. He then takes center stage. And while clinging to his blanket... his security blanket... Linus reads aloud St. Luke’s account of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem. In a moment of great significance, when he recites the words of the angels to the shepherds, “Fear not”, he drops his blanket and leaves it on the floor. He then resumes proclaiming the gospel. His fears have suddenly vanished and his anxieties removed. Now his security is anchored in God’s word and the revelation of Christ’s birth. In Christ, God has entered our world and has drawn near to us. In the stable of Bethlehem an unlikely event occurs: heaven and earth meet. Heaven has come down to earth. “For us men and for our salvation” he has truly come down. God bending down to his creation sums up the mystery of salvation history. Christ has come to be our Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.”

It is worth noting that one particular phrase turns up no fewer than four times in the Infancy Narratives. We first hear it when John the Baptist is announced. We hear it again in the Annunciation of Mary. We hear it a third time in Joseph’s dream. And, finally, it is spoken to the shepherds of the field. The simple phrase that so dominates the story of Christ’s coming is just two words: “fear not”.

In life, we are prey to all sorts of fears and anxieties. And these include ageing, illness, death and the loss of a job, among others. And all too often we seek our security in the passing things of life, which satisfies us but only for a short time, such as wealth, power, sex, drugs and cosmetics that make us “feel young”.

Charlie brown’s earnest question, “What is Christmas all about?”, has been ably answered by St. Paul in his letter to Titus. “The grace of God has appeared”. God has come into our midst. He has truly appeared as a child. He is so powerful that He makes Himself weak and defenseless and in need of our help.

God’s sign is simplicity. He makes himself small for us. As we take communion at mass let us recall that Christ willed to be born in Bethlehem, which means “House of Bread”. Christ, the Living Bread, come down from heaven. Christ is so small that, as communicants, we can touch and hold Him in the palm of our hands! Amazing! Heaven is in our hands!

In one of the most loved hymns of Christmas, “O Little Town of Bethlehem”, we sing the words, “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight” The nativity scene is a visible reminder of God’s closeness and goodness. It is as if God is saying to each one of us, “Have no fear. I am always with you”.

Amen!