

## Commentary to the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord



Message: There is more. God wants to do a miracle in your life. Merry Christmas! Don't be afraid to say it. Merry Christmas! Maybe you saw it on TV earlier this month - the ceremony lighting our National Christmas Tree. President Obama said this about Christmas: "It's the story of hope — the birth of a singular child into the simplest of circumstances - a child who would grow up to live a life of humility, and kindness, and compassion; who traveled with a message of empathy and understanding; who taught us to care for the poor, and the marginalized, and those who are different from ourselves.

And more than two millennia later, the way he lived still compels us to do our best to build a more just and tolerant and decent world." That's a nice statement, but there is more. Jesus' birth does speak about simplicity, compassion and care for the marginalized, but there is more. That's what I want to speak to you about this Christmas Eve. Jesus' birth is more than a past event that continues to inspire us. Jesus' birth continues to happen today - not just in a sentimental or even mystical sense, but in a real way. To explain, let me give an example. Some of you remember the 70's when the Communists took over South Vietnam. They arrested and imprisoned the Archbishop of Saigon: Francois-Xavier Nguyen van Thuan. He spent 13 years in prison, nine of them in solitary confinement. While in prison he stealthily obtained a small quantity of wine and hosts. Since he had no container to use as a chalice, each day he placed three drops of wine and a drop of water in his hand to say Mass.

Thus Archbishop Thuan held in hands the tiny amount of wine and bread which became Jesus' Body and Blood. As I imagined the Archbishop tenderly holding Jesus, I thought of Bethlehem and the Blessed Virgin cradling her newborn child. The Mass whether celebrated in a prison in Hanoi or a beautiful church like ours - is Bethlehem. It has meaning because of Jesus true presence, once again in a humble, hidden form. Jesus birth happened 2000 years ago and as President Obama points out, it continues to inspire us. But there is more: His birth not only continues to inspire; it continues. He becomes physically present in a humble form. The bread and wine become his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. I heard about a parish that saw this miracle in lovely way. Like us they pick a child to place the Infant Jesus in the manger. But when they go to the sacristy cupboard, the statue is gone. They search frantically and finally a child finds a small basket of unconsecrated hosts.

The priest doesn't know what to do so he places the hosts in the manger. The priest then does his best with the homily, explaining that the original manger was a feeding trough for animals, that Bethlehem means "House of Bread" and that the Child Jesus would one day offer himself as the Bread of Life. After communion, without anyone knowing how, the statue of the Infant Jesus reappears in the manger, looking newer and brighter than anyone remembered. The parishioners continue to recount this event to anyone who will listen. Christmas is a time of wonder. In the Bible the word miracle signifies wonder - an unexpected marvel. You can understand the meaning of a miracle if you remember that God is a God of order. The Bible says that He created the world by bringing order out of chaos - and that God has established laws so that the world functions in a way we can understand and even predict. But sometimes God does the unexpected so He can get our attention. That happened above all at Christmas when God became man. If he did the unexpected in Bethlehem, He can do the unexpected in your life. Perhaps you come tonight needing a miracle. Things have gone bad with your finances, your health, your marriage, your children, your emotional well-being. Christmas means that God not only cares for the world; he cares for you. I invite you: give him a try.

Try God. In the Mass we have the miracle of bread becoming the Body of Jesus. God wants to do a miracle in your life. He can't wait to do that for you, but he will wait - for you to ask. So you won't think it's just a bit of good luck, God wants you to ask. Give God a try. I conclude with a famous painting. It shows Jesus standing before a door, his hand lifted in a gesture of knocking. When the artist first showed the painting some sharp eyed person noticed that the door had no knob. He said to the artist, "you made a mistake. What kind of door is that without a handle?"

But the artist replied, "You are correct, but it was not a mistake. The only handle is on the inside. Only you can open that door to Jesus." Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart tonight. Let him come in. Ask him for that miracle you need. There is more. God wants to do a miracle in your life. As we hear in our Christmas readings: "The kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy...Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds." Amen.

Fr Phil Bloom