

## **We are to be gifts to God, as He is a gift to us**

*From the Christmas Midnight Mass at the Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo.*

In our Gospel at this midnight Mass, we hear the words of the angel spoken to us: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today, in the city of David, a Savior has been born for you, who is Messiah and Lord.”

My sisters and brothers, reflect upon those words for they are spoken to us on this Christmas night and they are fulfilled in our hearing of them. The good news of great joy is proclaimed for all people, and the Savior who has been born for you is Christ the Lord.

Look at the word “for” as it is used throughout our readings. Our God reveals to us how much he is “for” us. Everything our God does is for us, his people. We see this night the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah in which the Lord speaks to the people, “The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light...a light has shown. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing...for a child is born to us, a son is given us...” Once again we see the tremendous action of God in the world. God Himself acts on behalf of humanity, *for us*; a child is born to us, a son is given us; that is Jesus Christ who is wonder counselor, God hero, Father Forever, Prince of Peace. God himself confirms and sustains all of this for us. It is God’s action upon us! The Lord reminds us, and the words of the prophet Isaiah remind us, to question, “Why does God do this for us?” “The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this” – God’s zeal is for us, His people, for humanity!

In the second reading from Paul’s letter to Titus, we see, once again, a God who gives Himself for us. Listen to the words of Paul as he writes, “the grace of God has appeared, saving all – the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, to deliver us.” Once again this shows God’s action for His people, for us – that Jesus came to deliver us. Jesus Christ and Jesus alone is the Word made flesh in our midst, God Himself, the second person of the Trinity, the Savior of the world.

All is gift for humanity. From the very beginning in the book of Genesis, when God creates Adam and Eve, he creates human beings for himself, for love, to love him in return. Sacred Scripture reveals God’s love for humanity, for us. God has constantly tried to demonstrate his love. He is a God of tremendous humility in his love for us. We see how humble our God is – a God who makes himself a total gift for us, in his birth, life, death and resurrection.

As we gaze upon the manger scene and as we listen to the story of the birth of our Savior, my dearest brothers and sisters, look at the humility of God, that God himself, the second person of the Trinity, chose to enter the world as a vulnerable child, an infant, totally dependent upon Mary and Joseph. He is a God who has loved us so much, that he did not choose to enter the world and just appear and say “Here I am,” but he chose to become one of us, so that we might become like him. In this infant, we see the humility of our God who surrenders himself for us and for our salvation.

We are called to respond in the same way, with great receptivity to our God that will transform our lives, so that our entire life will be ordered and directed to our God – just as God’s entire life and love is directed toward us and for us. This is a wondrous love, a love of total self giving.

My dearest brothers and sisters, our God is not one who stops giving himself. Today we celebrate the Word made flesh in this Year of the Eucharist. Just as we believe that, 2,000 years ago, the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and the Word became flesh in her womb, so, too, the Holy Spirit overshadows the gifts of simple bread and wine. Through the words of Jesus, in the voice of the priest, the Word is made flesh once again in the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ that you and I receive in the Eucharist.

My dearest daughters and sons, open your eyes to this great mystery of the Eucharist, of the Word made flesh, of the zeal of our God for us – our God who did not stop coming on Christmas morning, but continues to come and to dwell in our midst in the Eucharist. He who is the Word made flesh continues to give himself for us.

Listen to the words in the Eucharistic Prayer, the words of Jesus, “This is my body which will be given up for you. [My blood] will be shed for you and for all.” Do not our hearts burn within us when we hear those words and realize the depth of the love of God who gives himself totally and completely for us? The Word made flesh is in our own midst! God himself is present among us!

Jesus reminds us in the Gospel of John that “my flesh is real food, my blood is real drink.” The reality of the presence of the Word made flesh in the Eucharist is a wondrous gift. It reveals the humility of God, who gives himself totally and completely.

My sisters and brothers, he who was born of Mary and laid in a manger, he who healed the blind and raised the dead, he who drove demons out, he who died on the cross for us, he who is living and risen and seated at the right hand of the Father, he is the one present in the Eucharist! He is the one that you and I will receive this morning as we come forward to receive Holy Communion! He is a God who is truly “for us” – for you!

We hear within John's Gospel, also, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son.” He continues to give us his only son in the Eucharist. It is not just a once-in-a-lifetime gift. It is a gift that pours itself out each and every day in the Eucharist. What then is our response to this tremendous gift that our God gives to us – this wondrous, this awesome gift? We are called to respond as our God has responded to us. We are called to make ourselves a gift to our God.

My sisters and brothers, as God has given himself for us, so, too, are you and I called to give ourselves to God. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist and come to the Eucharist, we are to offer ourselves to the Father, to make ourselves a gift to the Father.

Listen to the words of the Eucharistic prayer, “...through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever.” The way you and I give glory to the Father is by offering our lives as a gift to the Father with, in and through Jesus Christ. Every time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, just as God is for us, so, too, are we to become “for” God – to give ourselves completely as gifts, recognizing that all good comes from God alone.

That is why St. Paul in his letter to Titus writes, “The grace of God has appeared, saving all, and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires, to live temperately, justly and devoutly in this age.” This age is in 2004 and 2005, which we are entering into. You and I, my sisters and

brothers, are called to live justly, temperately and devoutly, to give ourselves completely to our God, in this Year of the Eucharist. We are to be eager to do what is good. We are called to make a similar act of humility as our God has made for us – to give ourselves as gifts to our God.

In conclusion, my sisters and brothers, I ask each of us to reflect upon the tremendous humility of our God – a God who gave himself not only the first Christmas morning, not only on the cross, but continues to give himself in the Eucharist for us – the Word made flesh for us, even in our own time. Pray for a deeper faith, that our hearts and our minds may be open to seeing and recognizing the Word made flesh in the Eucharist. Pray for a greater humility to give yourselves completely to God as “gift,” recognizing that all good comes from God alone.

My dearest brothers and sisters, live more devoutly, growing in love of the Eucharist and becoming “for” God in response to our God who is truly for us. Be people who recognize the zeal of God for us revealed in Christmas and in the Eucharist. Pray for the grace of zeal, to have the zeal of God for the Eucharist, and a love for the Eucharist -- the Word made flesh in our midst. Then we, too, in the times in which we live, in the darkness of our own time, will be able to proclaim with Isaiah, “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light has shown. You have brought them abundant joy.”

May each one of us experience the joy of the birth of Jesus Christ each time we receive the Eucharist, the Word made flesh, in our midst, given to us by a God who is truly “for” us.