

# Archbishop Lori's 2017 Christmas Homily

## Christmas Homily 2017

*St. Joseph, Cockeysville*

*Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland*

*Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Baltimore*

Yesterday, I went to visit a very good friend of mine in Charlotte, North Carolina. His name was Bishop William Curlin, the retired bishop of Charlotte and formerly a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington, just as once I was.

At 90 years of age, Bishop Curlin was nearing death and indeed, last evening, he departed this world for eternity.

I met the Bishop in 1972, when he was Father Curlin. At the time, he was Director of Vocations and I was a seminarian. Ours was an instant friendship but also a friendship that flourished for decades. As a dedicated parish priest, a brilliant preacher, a lover of the poor and the sick,

Bishop Curlin remains my ideal for how to live my vocation. But don't take it from me. Mother Teresa thought so too and sought him out for spiritual advice whenever she was in the United States.

Bishop Curlin's love and care has been a constant part of my life, a friendship for which I am deeply grateful. I am sure his love for me changed the course of my life.

But there's more. I'm not the only one.

There are probably hundreds and hundreds of what I call "Curlin-ites" - men and women in all walks of life whose lives were changed by his friendship, compassion, and wisdom.

Many of us know one another and we all have the same story to tell.

I'll bet that many of you have a "Bishop Curlin-like" figure in your life: someone who took an interest in you when you were young; someone whose example and friendship helped guide the course of your life. It might have been a teacher or a coach, such as the Assistant Lacrosse Coach at Calvert Hall, Dave Huntley, who went home to God only a few days ago.

During these days of Christmas, dear friends, it might be good for all of us to remember and pray for those who helped us get our start in life, whether or not we actually followed the guidance they offered us.

And, you know, when we stop to realize the impact of such people in our lives, don't we have the urge to reconnect with them? If we've maintained a friendship with our mentors through the years, we will want to deepen that friendship. If our contact with our mentors has been spotty, isn't there something in us that wants to pick up the phone and call, or send an email, or maybe even get in the car and visit in person?

And if our mentors have gone home to God, don't we still feel their influence in our lives, years later, a sort of spiritual friendship that transcends time and eternity

Today I invite you to think of Jesus with the same warmth, the same trust, the same love, the same gratitude that we normally reserve for those who have wisely guided the course of our lives.

We've just heard the heartwarming story of the birth of Jesus - the poverty of the stable and manger, the starlit sky, the song of angels, the amazement of shepherds, the worried husband, the loving Mother . . . the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.

This is the way the Son of God chose to draw near to us as our ultimate mentor: our prophet, our priest and Savior, the king and lover of our souls: the Son of God became one of us.

Jesus is like every guide and protector in our lives, only better. Just as our mentors seem to find us in times of trouble and confusion, so it was that God, in his love for the world, sent his Son to a troubled humanity to be with us, to experience our poverty and pain, to offer us a word of hope, to bind up our wounds, to suffer and die for us, to be for us "the way, the truth, and the life."

Like all good mentors, Jesus does not overwhelm us with his power and wisdom. Jesus was born humble, moved about as one meek and humble of heart, yet, who he was, what he said, and what he did . . . changed everything for billions and billions of people in every epoch of history and ultimately, the course of history itself.

Even as our mentors always seem to be there for us, even with the passage of time, so too the Son of God assumed our human nature *permanently* and draws near to us every moment of every day throughout our lives. For even though the Savior walked the earth for little more than three decades, he is with us until the end of the world and in his glorified humanity sits at the right hand of the Father, he, the Son of God.

And then there's this: Just as my mentor, Bishop Curlin was also a mentor to many others, so too Jesus loves each of us in a personal way, more than we love ourselves, *while at the same time* drawing near to every person, for he is 'the true light that enlightens everyone who is born into the world.'

What's more, he has gathered those whose lives he has touched into the Church, so

that we might come to know and love one another and help each other to follow him unreservedly throughout our lives.

Finally, even as none of us who are mentees of Bishop Curlin measure up to him, so too none of us in the Church ever measure up to the Lord's goodness, yet, for all our sins and foibles, it in the Church that we seek and find the Lord who comes to us constantly in Word and Sacrament, and in the friendship of charity.

This Christmas, let us have the courage to ask about our relationship with the One who is the mentor of mentors, the guide of all guides, the only One whose Name is above every other name, and the only Name in heaven and on earth in which salvation can be found.

What is our relationship with the Lord like?

Has our relationship with him deepened by daily prayer and weekly Mass? Are the Lord's teaching and example what guide our daily life? Do we experience the joy of allowing his Gospel to take root in our lives, and to become the lens through which we see ourselves and our loved ones, the lens through which we finally perceive what the Church herself is all about. Or has our relationship with the Lord trailed off - like a relationship with a former coach or teacher whom we rarely call or visit, someone we still respect but with whom we seldom make contact?

Could it be that our relationship with the Lord is virtually non-existent - perhaps out of habit, or fear, or the bad example of others?

When we finally do reconnect with those mentors who have loved us so, deep down we feel we've done ourselves a wonderful favor.

Let this be our gift to the Lord, to those around us, and to ourselves - that this Christmas, when we peer into the stable and behold the Christ-Child, we resolve in

God' grace to deepen our connection to our Savior in his Church, and if that relationship is cold or distant, to draw near to him who, in his mercy, has made himself so utterly and lovingly accessible.

I conclude with the words of Pope Francis: "Contemplating his humble and infinite love, let us simply tell him: Thank you. Thank you because you have done all this *for me.*"

May you have a most blessed and joyous Christmas!