

# **Archbishop Lori's Homily: Advent Evening of Reflection; Baltimore Area, Order of Malta, Federal Association**

*Advent Reflection*

*Baltimore Area, Order of Malta, Federal Association*

*Cathedral of Mary Our Queen*

*Dec. 5, 2018*

We've gathered together for our annual evening of recollection and I thank Msgr. Woy for graciously hosting this event and I thank all of you most sincerely for your presence here this evening. We remember with love this evening Margaret Riehl who joined us last year for this time of fellowship and reflection. In fact, she sat next me and was looking at me as I spoke. Without her saying a word, I somehow felt that she was setting the bar a little higher for me! May her great soul rest in peace!

Advent, as we know so well, is a season of expectation and hope. It is a season when we look forward to the celebration of Christmas. It is also a season when we say that we are looking forward to the coming of Christ at the end of time, though St. Augustine chided the people of Hippo for crying out, "Maranatha!" - "Come Lord Jesus" - yet fearing the second coming of Christ and the judgment he would render. At every Mass we say that 'we await the Lord in joyful hope' - meaning the coming of the Lord at the end of time - yet, the very thought that the Lord would come again, let us say tonight or tomorrow morning, unsettles me. Nothing reminds me more than the prospect of the second coming that I'm a work in progress and that the progress is slow and laborious.

Yet Advent is not merely a season of expectation is a season of hope. For lots of reasons, 2018 was a difficult year both in the Church and beyond. I, for one, won't be too sad to see 2018 slip into the history books. But that's nothing to look forward to; flipping the calendar doesn't change things. Besides, the hope and expectation

proper to Advent is not mere optimism that somehow next year will be better than this one. No, the real nature of Advent hope might be captured better by the shortness of the days and darkness of the nights in these days leading up to Christmas.

## **A World Shrouded in Darkness**

It was amid the darkness that the Savior was born. The darkness of the crude stable where Jesus was born was punctuated only by the flickering lights of candles and torches. Dark indeed was the night. For Jesus was born not merely in the dark of night; rather, he was born into the dark night of humanity's sinful state. Darkness seemed to govern human hearts and history. In spite of God's portents and signs – the Exodus, the Covenant, the Deliverance – in spite of God's messages through the mouths of prophets and kings, people still stumbled along in the darkness, all too prone to lose their way. Darkness reigned over the good earth God had made.

Was there any hope that the flickering lights in a rough Bethlehem stable could ever be seen in the darkness, let alone overcome it? Was there any chance that the Child was in fact 'the light of the world'? Yet, as the story of Jesus' birth unfolds, the night sky was brightly lit not only with stars but also with angels reflecting the beauty and brightness of the One who is 'God from God, light from light, true God from true God.' And over this stable there hovered a star, brighter than the rest, the star of the Epiphany, by which the greatness of the little Child, born into the poorest of circumstances, was first revealed to the nations.

"The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."

## **Contemporary Darkness**

As the year 2018 comes to its end and 2019 dawns upon us, we may feel that darkness still reigns over the earth. Looking about, under cover of darkness, we see a brutal disregard for the sacredness of human life, especially the lives of unborn children, the frail elderly, and the chronically ill. We see amid the darkness many people living at the point of a sword for the faith that they profess. We see the sorry plight of prisoners, immigrants and refugees. We live in a city plagued by violence, addiction, lost lives and opportunity. We live in a culture perpetually outraged and

increasingly polarized.

We stumble through the darkness as a Church we love so much grapples with the appalling abuse of young people and its cover-up by Church leaders. And we sense the darkness that lurks in our own hearts and homes. How easily we prefer the darkness of sin to the light of grace. And do we not look with dismay as many, especially the young, forsake the light of faith for the gloom of a godless secularity.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” The Light Blazes Forth Even Now

Could it be that, even in our times, the flickering light in the Bethlehem stable might blaze forth? The Epiphany star above the stable did not, after all, disappear, but glowed brightly as the Spirit hovered over Jesus at his Baptism in the Jordan and as the Savior first manifested his power and glory at the Wedding Feast of Cana. Jesus, ‘the light of the world,’ would manifest his Father’s glory as in the power of the Holy Spirit he preached the Good News, healed the sick, raised the dead, and expelled demons.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Not only did the light of the star illuminate the earth, it ignited a blaze that has spread over its face. “I have come to set the earth on fire,” Jesus said, “and how I wish it were blazing.” That fire was lit upon Cross, in the glory of the Resurrection, on the day the Lord commissioned the Apostles to preach the Gospel, and on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came in the form of fire. From that moment on, when Peter raised his voice and addressed the crowds, the light of faith began to envelop and encircle the earth.

Ages come and go. Still the Gospel is proclaimed, celebrated and lived. Martyrs then and now bear witness to Christ crucified. Saints from ages past and from our own times still inspire. Unsung heroes daily live their faith, while the world either fails to notice or pretends not to see. In the Body of Christ he hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the troubled are consoled the young are educated, the sick are cared for, prisoners are visited, the stranger is welcomed & the poor rejoice to hear the Gospel. The frontiers of darkness are pushed back.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

## **Does the Light Burn Brightly in Us?**

That same fire was ignited in our hearts the day we were baptized, baptized indeed with the Holy Spirit and fire. Let us ask: Is that fire still burning brightly within us? Have we guarded that precious flame and kept it from going out amid the howling winds of anger and controversy raging around us? Have we taken care that it not be doused by life's pleasures and anxieties? In the end, it does no good to bemoan the stage of the world. Rather, the light of faith and zeal for the Gospel must burn brightly in our hearts.

How, then, does it burn in our hearts as members of Malta? Is it not in the fulfillment of our commitment to foster and protect the Faith? This is never an easy commitment to fulfill, even in what passes for 'normal' times – let alone in these days when the scandal of sexual abuse engulfs the Church. How can the faith be true, how can the Church's teaching be good and true when its bishops and priests engaged in such horrific betrayals of innocence and trust? How can we defend the faith when our own faith is sorely tried? We find ourselves believing amid the darkness, hoping against hope, and searching for the courage still to speak of our faith, still to explain it to others, still to share it with those who have never really heard the Good News. Even amid this darkness, we press on:

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

How else does the light shine amid this dark night of the Church's soul? Is it not through the light and love of the charity God's grace enables us to do – the ministry of sharing our love with the needy and the outcast, the ministry of serving the needs of 'our lords and ladies, the sick and the poor.' The light shines in darkness when you serve at Sarah's Hope in West Baltimore, when you visit My Sister's Place, or spend time at Gift of Hope, or call out bingo numbers at St. Elizabeth's. The light shines in darkness when the Mercy Mobile Clinic makes its way into Baltimore's poorest neighborhoods or when you put on the "Eve Before the Eve" Christmas dinner at St. Joseph's Manor. You wouldn't imagine the light of Christ would shine from a dentist's chair but it does just that at the dental clinic at Our Daily Bread. Nor would you think a Baltimore prison cell would be a place of brightness but when

you visit inmates and bring them Bibles, prayer books & prayer cards the light of faith glows brightly in those rooms without a view.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”

### **Invincible Hope**

In the end, what give us such invincible hope? They placed the lifeless body of the Savior in a darkened tomb. Even there the light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Such a light will cast its saving light even in the most desperate situations created by fallibility, stupidity, and wickedness and ultimately win through to victory.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it!”

May you have a truly blessed Advent and a joyous Christmas!