

Peace on earth

On the first Christmas night, the sky was lit with stars but shone brighter than ever with God's glory. Born that night was Jesus, "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12) and "the true light which enlightens everyone" (Jn 1:9). Filling this resplendent scene with song were the angels who proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Lk 2:14) - words we often echo at Holy Mass.

Glory to God, peace on earth, good will in human relationships: Do these words not awaken in our hearts a deep longing? For we live in a world that is anything but peaceful. We live in the shadow of nuclear war and terrorism. Many fellow Christians and other believers suffer religious persecution. Millions of refugees are dispossessed and driven from their homes. Many at home and abroad suffer from fear of violence, poverty, racism, lack of health care and economic inequality.

Peace is threatened by the lack of reasoned dialogue among political leaders, nationally and internationally. Neither can we overlook the societal discord and lack of civility so painfully evident, for example, in social media.

The angels' greeting for the Prince of Peace may also strike closer to home, for many families suffer from a lack of peace. At Christmas those things that divide our families weigh heavy on our hearts. Every family has its disagreements but in some they harden into grudges and alienation. We think of how discordant relationships disrupt the workplace and other communities of which we are a part. And, ultimately, if we want to have peace in the world, we cannot neglect the disordered state of our own hearts.

The Word of God and great spiritual writers constantly teach us that when our lives are in order, the peace of Jesus reigns in us and we become sources of true peace in a divided world. When our lives are hobbled by various forms of disorder, we contribute to the world's divisions and discord.

How does the Child in the manger bring peace to our world, to our families, and to our hearts? Let us look at Jesus with the eyes of faith. He is God's eternal Son who

assumed our humanity. In doing so, he showed us how much He must love us if he would send his Son to save us from our sins and how highly he regards our humanity that his Son would become one of us. It also shows us the humanity of Jesus is a model for our humanity, exemplifying the beatitudes and every virtue.

And finally, it is through the humanity of Jesus that we are saved. The Son of God became man so that he could offer himself totally to the Father and to us. His gift of self is meant to shape who we are and how we should live.

So as Christmas approaches, let us open our hearts to Jesus, true God and true man. Let us ask him to help us with the grace of the Holy Spirit to put our lives in order; may they be modeled on and share in his sacred humanity. Our conformity to Christ's humanity involves a lifelong process of growing in intimacy with Jesus through prayer, the sacraments and service to others. The closer we are drawn to Christ and the more our humanity reflects his goodness and love, the greater will be our peace and the better equipped we will be to bring peace to a troubled world.

May you have a Blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas!