

The Word Became Human and Dwelt Among US

I love the story of an old man and his wife who were going to sleep in an upstairs bedroom of their very old farm house on Christmas Eve:

It is snowing heavily outside and a cold east wind was howling. They tried to put the storm out of their minds as they lay in bed. But soon — the husband thought he heard a sound at the window...: it was the faintest tapping sound.

And so, he got up slowly from their four-poster bed, put on his slippers and hobbled to the window. Pulling the curtain back, he looked out... there was nothing to see but the dim outline of his barn and the mounting drifts of snow.

He was about to turn away, when he heard the sound again: a very slight tapping sound. It was close by – just outside the window...

He then spotted a tiny form on the outside window sill: huddled in the corner of the nailed tight window... all curled up in a ball... brown feathers all coated with wet snow! Suddenly: wings fluttered! Shaking the snow away and madding a tapping sound against the windowpane! It was a little bird – a sparrow!

The old man could tell the little bird was in tough shape: shivering in the cold. Despite the best efforts to shake-off the snow, the fluttering of the little wings became less and less – as the snow began to cover the little bird. The sparrow was close to death...

The old man thought to himself: just across the yard was the warm barn, full of cows, with the door left slightly open – where dozens of birds who had found their way to safety.... If only he could let the little bird know how to get there!

There had to be some way he could connect with the sparrow...; some way he could communicate to the little bird that safety was just a few hundred yards away... .

But at that moment the old man realized a great sobering truth: the only way he could lead the beautiful little sparrow to safety and life, was to become a sparrow himself....

“And the Word became human and dwelt among us.”

“And the Word became human and dwelt among us”!

Sisters and brothers, On this Christmas, we join with sisters and brothers throughout our city , nation and world – that, in so many ways, is hurting and cold and shivering, like that little sparrow on the window-sill – and yet... proclaiming *amazing Good News*:

Proclaiming that our God loves us so much, cares for us so much, that our God became human... walked in our shoes: "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*" to save us from those cold window-sills of life — to show us the way to:

true life and safety,
true light and peace,
true warmth and love.

The *Incarnation* – Emmanuel: God With Us...!

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Sisters and brothers, I don't know about you, but on this Christmas 2018, it seems to me that we need this Good News more than ever!

- Our Nation is in turmoil;
- Our world is consumed in war, injustice and violence;
- Our church is engulfed in scandal.

... and like the old man at his window-sill on that cold Christmas Eve, how often have we said to ourselves and others, this past year – since last Christmas: *What can I do? What can we do? We have to do something!*

The first step, the primary step, that Jesus reveals to us by *his* word and example – by *his* ministry – by *his very life...* ... *the first step* is to *embrace the simple, yet profound truth*:

- ❖ the heart of the Gospel...,
- ❖ the core of our Religion...,
- ❖ the kernel of the Good News of Salvation:

... Every human being, every person – without exception – is created, formed like a work of art – in God's image and likeness... *out of Love! Every human being is precious, unique, special child of God: without exception!*

Jesus proclaims that buried beneath our brokenness, woundedness, human failings ... the spark of God is present: Each person is a Blessed Sacrament! Each person is Jesus... the Body of Christ!

Brothers and sisters, this is no 'pie-in-the-sky' fluff or out-of-the-world dream. To the extent that we let this vision of Jesus seep into our hearts, we begin to recognize and embrace our innate goodness and the innate goodness of all others. We begin to recognize that when I hurt or put down or reject or ignore another, I'm rejecting a child of God, I'm hurting a brother or sister...; if I'm indifferent to the suffering of others, I'm indifferent to a sister or brother.

Imagine how our lives would change – how our Nation and world would change – how our church would change – IF we were to embrace this vision!

The kernel of the Good News that Jesus birthed into our world 2,000 years ago and we are called to birth into the world and the church on Christmas 2018.

What can I do? What can we do?

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Well... in addition to what we all do personally... our little Parish on Syracuse's south-east side – because of our faith in Jesus – because of your generosity of time, talent and treasure – because of your courage to stand-up and say: NO! to injustice and social sin in the richest nation of the world – because of your faith-full ability to see the face of Jesus in the most vulnerable... let's look back, *just at our Advent journey* as a Parish:

1. over 70 parishioners were involved in preparing and serving a delicious turkey dinner with all the trimmings, topped off with a Christmas Choir, for the folks at the Oxford Inn, men's shelter last Sunday;
2. our high school kid's once again spear-headed the collection of socks and gloves for the men at "the Ox;"
3. Bags of food and a \$2,000 gift was given to the Catholic Charities Eastside Food Pantry, for families in need in our extended neighborhood, collected here and delivered by our Dave Kirby and his Team;
4. Christmas Stockings for those at the Justice Center downtown are bulging with packets of Hot Cocoa mix collected here; and many dozens of Chap-stiks are available for the comfort of those at Jamesville Penitentiary.

5. Last week the Zumiez Foundation – affiliated with the retail store in Carousel Mall – with which our late Denise Garrett connected some 6 or 7 years ago – delivered 97 boxes of warm winter coats, hoodies, socks, hats, and gloves which our Barb Hadley and her crew distributed to Unity Acres, My Father’s Kitchen, the Samaritan Center, the Oxford Inn, Sr. Maura for the Jamesville Penitentiary, Eastern Farmworkers and the Homeless Mental Health Program;

6. Each weekend we provided an alternative Christmas shopping opportunity – to help ensure that the monies we spend on gifts for loved ones, might also benefit the wider community and world: the sale of jewelry hand-made by the young men, former sex-workers, brought off the streets by our Break Margins Africa Ministry brought in over \$1000; the *Hand-to-Hand* Fair Trade Craft Store located in the Spiritual Renewal Center opened for us after just one Mass, and brought in something over \$800! Peg Barnett brought her wonderful hand-made crafts and brought in about \$1,300 to support our Maternal Health Care Ministry in our sister community in Villanueva, Nicaragua; our friend Trini Ramos who is also a partner in our Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition came last week with hand-crafted items from Guatemala, made by women there to support their children and families. He made over \$400. And, our Sr. Terri brought us the beautiful cards and art pieces she creates and raised money in support of the retired Sisters of Saint Francis.

7. Also last weekend, the Eastern Farmworkers – a grassroots organization that works with and for the well-being of our migrant and immigrant communities – held their annual Christmas Celebration in our Bishop Harrison Center, in which we also participated by providing cookies and transportation.

In addition: day after day, our Refugee Welcoming Taskforce supports the transition of our sisters and brothers in our Congolese Community helping with a multitude of essential needs such as clothing, furniture, support for job training, transportation to doctor’s appointments, social services appointments and/or to food pantries, etc., etc.

AND, as a Parish we continue to go “upstream” to identify and confront the sources of injustice and poverty in our community and Nation. Representing and supported by our Parish and our Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition, our Sheila Sicilia traveled to the southern border and spent time in Tijuana to stand in solidarity with and care for the needs of our sisters and brothers seeking asylum from the violence and corruption which our own government foments in Central America.

We've spent a great deal of time addressing the abuse crisis in our church: with a series of listening and educational sessions through which some 30 folks have signed on to work together with national Catholic Organizations to move the issue of church reform forward.

And: I could talk about the on-going work of our Legion Of Mary who routinely meet to pray and take their time to visit parishioners... and our awesome Pastoral Care Ministry, organized by our Barb Hadley, which just ensured that each of our homebound parishioners received a visit and gift from the Parish over these Christmas holy days...!

And the list goes on...

This is the fire – the spark – the hope this Christmas; joining with other people of Good Will throughout the world: little-by-little light overcomes darkness; love overcomes hate; and – soon and very soon – the world, the church, our nation will become what God intended.

I invite all of us to reflect on the vision of Jesus: the Good News, as we celebrate these Christmas days and prepare for a new year. How might this vision influence a new year's resolution or two that we might chose to move us to be a bit more the persons – the people – God created us to be...?!

The Word became human and dwelt among us!

The Word became human *and dwelt among us!*

Merry Christmas!

Amen.