



DO NOT BE AFRAID!

I bring you good news of

GREAT LUKE
2:10
Joy

Monthly Reflection:

December 2020

A cold and cautious 'CoVid Christmas' or a captivating and cheerful 'Merry Christmas'? Even as the dark cloud of the pandemic continues to hold its vicious grip on most parts of the world, it is the voices to which we listen that will determine whether our hearts are leaning towards fear and worry or to hope and confidence. If Eve chose to listen to what her senses that were deceived by the serpent told her rather than to what God had said, the new Eve - Mary consciously chose to believe in the words of the angel Gabriel than to the anxiety and fear that would have typically welled up in her heart at the possibility of becoming pregnant as a virgin. If we choose to imitate our Mother in this time of uncertainty, the carols of peace and hope will reverberate in our hearts which no darkness can overcome.

Let our hearts hear anew, 'fear not, God is with you' – this is what God spoke to Mary (Lk. 1:30), Zechariah (Lk. 1:13), Joseph (Mt. 1:20) and to the shepherds (Lk. 2:10). It was to a people suffering under the ruthless and at times paranoid rule of the Roman vassal, King Herod, that God sent His only Son. It is never easy to listen to God's voice, especially when darkness tries to hem us in from all sides. Yet Mary and her likes show us the way. Even today, Christmas is the assurance of God's unlimited love for us (Jn. 3:16). Fear and its cousin worry arise from the 'absence of God' in our lives; when the voice of God is drowned out by competing noises. Let us break free from all the chains of fear and worry by 'welcoming Immanuel in our hearts', the God who will always be with us (Mt.1:23).

The culture of quarantine and lockdown can stifle us unless we are diligent. The physical limitations imposed can easily seep into our hearts and cloud our vision. Yet, the courage of the shepherds to venture out from the security of familiar grazing fields into the cold night with haste to see the Good News shows us that an open and good will can help us too to see the Light that overcomes all darkness.

Christmas reveals the mercy of God – Jesus, who will wash away all our sins (Mt. 1:21). Does not the repeated washing of our hands with soap and sanitizers to keep ourselves safe from the virus speak about a deeper washing that we all need? Let us journey with the Magi again to Bethlehem to behold with new eyes the One who came, just to wash us and save us with His blood. Let us hear afresh the words of assurance of John the Baptist over the clamouring voices of sin and weakness of our heart

"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). Yes, His blood washes away all our sins. Let us kneel with the magi and the shepherds and offer the best gift He desires from us – our hearts with all its dreams and disappointments.

The scientific community is united in the utility of masks in these times. Yet Christmas is all about unmasking! God unmasks his Son so that we can behold him and be saved. Christmas declares the 'kenosis' (self-emptying) of God (Phil. 2:7). May the contemplation of God who emptied himself to be born in the manger help us to realise that love is all about self-emptying. The subtle and coarse ways in which we have masked our egos and self needs to be unmasked. Peace according to St. Francis of Assisi is the conquest of our selfishness. May the exchange of gifts during this festive season be an expression of our desire to gift ourselves to others.

This pandemic is also a time when hope shines through the darkness. The magnanimity and selflessness with which the medical personnel, various enforcement agencies and volunteers stepped out risking their lives, facing challenges like shortage of equipment, reveals the value and dignity of human life that is engraved deep within us. The babe born in the poorest of circumstances forces us to contemplate on the goodness that is often disguised in poverty. As Pope Francis gently reminds us in his latest encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship (Fratelli Tutti) " the smallest, the weakest, the poorest should touch our hearts: indeed, they have a 'right' to appeal to our heart and soul. They are our brothers and sisters, and as such we must love and care for them" (#194).

God always speaks - even in darkness and silence. The first Christmas just passed by the thousands who thronged Bethlehem on that day. Yet to the few who heard the voice of God and acted upon it, a new path opened before them - a path of hope and joy. May this Christmas help us to hear the Good News anew and embrace its message with a new fervour.

With great joy, I wish each and every one of the Jesus Youth family a blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

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