

[Isaiah 62: 1-5, Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25 / Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14 / Isaiah 62: 11-12, Titus 3: 4-7 / Isaiah 52: 7-10, Hebrews 1: 1-6, Luke 2:1-14]

Merry Christmas! Welcome to all who join us tonight/today: parishioners, those who join us from other parishes; to students and military and former parishioners who have “come home for Christmas,” and to those who are searching for a spiritual home. May you find everything you need in this house.

Why does our Church exist? Why follow Christ? Here’s a 25 cent word for you. It’s called the kerygma: the basic teaching of our Christian faith. Sounds like “charisma” but add a “g” in the middle. You can find out more about it if you “Google” it! So consider the kerygma the Google of our Catholic faith! Here is what it says, basically:

God created us out of love — we are a free creation of His goodness. The original plan was perfect happiness with Him.

But we said no to this plan. We rebelled against God by being deceived by the Evil One. When sin entered the world, it separated humanity from God. Redemption was necessary in order to make eternal life with God possible. A Redeemer is someone who sacrifices themselves so that others may be saved.

God did not leave us in sin, and He responded to our infidelity with His fidelity. Christmas is God sending His Son to offer His life for our sins and to rob sin and death of its power. Jesus is the answer to sin and all of its effects. So today we celebrate not only the birth of Jesus, but the Incarnation: “carne” -- “flesh,” meat, “in” – becoming; “ation” – the act of. The act of becoming flesh.

The Word made flesh. Incarnation. Today’s second 25 cent word! I tried to teach this to the thirty kids that were sitting in front of the altar at the Christmas Eve 5 PM Mass. I got them to say the word several times: Incarnation, incarnation. Then one kid shouted out: “Reincarnation!” I said, “That’s a different religion, and a different word. And a whole ‘nother homily!

Through Baptism, we share in the victory of Jesus Christ over sin. We share in His identity because He took on our flesh and was not ashamed to be called our brother. He gives us the power to live as His disciples; to be free!

Being Jesus' disciple changes our identity. As we are learning in the Archdiocese of Detroit, we are called to become today's third 25-cent words: "joyful missionary disciples." That doesn't mean we always walk around with a silly grin on our faces. It means we have the deep peace and joy of Jesus in our hearts, so deep that people say, "I want what you have." We are called to be missionary: to take the Good News of the Gospel beyond these church walls into a world that needs so desperately needs to hear it. We are called to be disciples – to learn that learning our faith is a cradle-to-grave proposition. We are claimed by God and are then become co-heirs with Christ of eternal, perfect, unbelievable joy in heaven. But the recent revelations and scandals in our Church this year have caused pain, anger and has even led some people to stop being Catholic.

The Chief Shepherd of the Archdiocese of Detroit, Archbishop Allen Vigneron, wrote and sent a letter to every registered Catholic in southeast Michigan addressing this. He speaks of a "great hope" in spite of this darkness, to fix this mess, and that "God wants His Church back" That's the most powerful part of the letter to me. "God wants His Church back. God will give us, His people, a new path to transparency, to justice to accountability and to healing.

The coming of the Word Made flesh this day is God's answer to our sin, to our brokenness, to our hunger and thirst to be the best version of ourselves.

St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) said: "Are we ready to receive Him? Before the birth of Jesus, his parents asked for a simple dwelling place, but there was none. If Mary and Joseph were looking for a home for Jesus, would they choose ... your heart, and all it holds? Let us pray that we shall be able to welcome Jesus at Christmas..."

We hope our Christmas present to you this year will help accomplish this. It has two books in one: "Welcome to Our Parish" and "Your Guide to the Mass." It includes the following topics: What is the Catholic Church and what do we believe? Salvation History, The Seven Sacraments, Roles in the Catholic Church, People at Mass, Gestures and Vestments.

I close with "A Letter from Jesus" which was sent to me by one of my e-

mail friends. It could be in a sense the prayer of Jesus to each one of us.
Imagine Jesus Christ Himself saying these words personally to you:

If you never felt pain, then how would you know that I am a Healer?
If you never had to pray, how would you know that I am a Deliverer?
If you never had a trial, how could you say that you have overcome it?
If you never felt sadness, how would you know that I am a Comforter?
If you never made a mistake, how would you know that I forgive?
If you knew all things, how would you know
 that I will answer your questions?
If you never were in trouble, how would you know
 that I will come to your rescue?
If you never were broken, then how would you know
 that I can make you whole?
If you never had a problem, how would you know that I can solve them?
If you never had any suffering, then how would you know
 what I went through?
If you never went through the fire, then how would you become pure?
If I gave you all the things you wanted, how would you appreciate them?
If I never corrected you, how would you know that I love you?
If you had all power, then how would you learn to depend on Me?
If your life was perfect, then what would you need Me for?

God loves you personally and has a plan for your life. Sin separates you from God. Jesus died on the cross to atone for your sins. This makes Heaven possible for you. Jesus is inviting you to accept His gift of salvation.

Do you want to accept that gift and follow Him as a disciple? Will you allow Jesus Christ to be born again in you during this Christmas season?

“Today is born a Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord!” Merry Christmas! AMEN!