

## Christmas Eve Homily 2015

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We all know that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birth....right? We hear the story yet again, and it stirs us with memories of tradition and faith. It is a wonderful story about Jesus being born as God's son sent to save us, to be called Emmanuel- God with us.

But it is not just about Jesus. Religion is meant to transform us, not just comfort us. This story is also our own birth that is being celebrated. Our spiritual birth is always happening- hopefully, unless we are closed to this wondrous Spirit in and around our lives. Jesus came that we might have joy and peace and love and mercy-- not just for ourselves, but for all whose lives we touch. God sent Jesus FOR US! Because WE are worthy. We are loved. We ALL are children of God. No matter what is going on in your life that has kept you from God's love, God is there for you. All of us. Every one of us all over the world: Muslim, Jew, Shinto, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Atheist, Christian, Not Sure, Doubter, drug addict, SINNER---ALL of us are embraced by this abundant love.

So if that is true, why don't we feel it? Why do so many people wonder if God really loves them when the main story of the Bible is about love?

Good question.

God sent Jesus, who as one child said is “God with skin on”, to show us that love. Jesus’ life was filled with love and compassion and justice for all people-especially those who were poor or oppressed or left out- as a matter of fact- they were his best friends!

Do we seek to live the way Jesus did? If not, why not???

I found a story I want to share with you tonight. It conveys the core of what the Holy Spirit is calling us all to, I think.

Here are the words of this story, as told by Michael J. Nadel

“In Crown Heights, there was a Jew, Yankel, who owned a bakery. He survived the camps. He once said, “You know why it is that I’m alive today? I was a kid, just a teenager at the time. We were on the train, in a boxcar, being taken to Auschwitz.

Night came and it was freezing, deathly cold, in that boxcar. The Germans would leave the cars on the side of the tracks overnight, sometimes for days on end without any food and of course, no blankets to keep us warm.’ He said “sitting next to me was an older Jew- this beloved elderly Jew- from my hometown I recognized, but I had never seen him like this. He was shivering from head to toe, and looked terrible. So I wrapped my arms around him and began rubbing him, to warm him up --I rubbed his arms, his legs, his face, his neck. I begged him to hang on. All night long, I kept the man warm this way. I was tired, I was freezing cold myself, my fingers were numb, but I didn’t stop rubbing that heat on to this man’s body. Hours and hours went by this way. Finally, night passed, morning came, and the sun began to shine. There was some warmth in the cabin, and then I look around the car to see some of the other Jews in the car. To my horror, all I could see were frozen bodies, and all I could hear was a deathly silence.

Nobody else in that cabin made it through the night—they died from the frost. Only two people survived; the old man and me...the old man survived because somebody kept him warm; I survived because I was warming somebody else. Let me tell you the secret of Judaism.

When you warm other people's hearts, you remain warm yourself. When you seek to support, encourage and inspire others; then you discover support, encouragement and inspiration in your own life as well. That, my friends, is 'Judaism 101'.

My friends, Jesus, the Jew, calls us to this kind of everyday living. When we save others—we save ourselves. When we answer that call with our lives, we are born anew. We need the story of Jesus' birth to remind us that God LOVES US and always calls us to be born anew.

I will leave you with a short video of questions made for this season of giving and receiving called 'All We Want'. This is by Nic Askew who makes weekly videos meant to enlighten us on this journey called life. (You can subscribe free by googling his name).

Questions:

“What is it that you want? .....

What is it that you've always longed for?.....

What is it that we've always longed for?.....

Might we find it together?” .....

Closing:

This Christmas, may we have the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. May we experience the love of God and share this love so that it is magnified beyond our wildest

imaginings. This Christmas may we all be born anew, and answer the call to be Christ to the world.

Amen.