

FREE TO LOVE

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The centre and the horizon of all

Christmas is the feast which reminds us of the quiet and unobtrusive way God entered our world, freely willing to become one of us.

The mystery of Incarnation cannot be ever explained, but through the unfathomed love of God who wishes from all eternity to intimately relate to each one of us.

Creating us in His image, i.e. with the capacity to love, to know and to, freely, choose, God infinitely respects our choices.

We are created free, hence responsible for the ways we live our life, for the relationships we form and for the decisions we take.

It is up to us to establish good and fruitful relations with the land and all that lives in it, within our family and community, in our society and with ourselves.

Yet, the above do not suffice for a fulfilling life without the most important thing of all: a vital relationship with the well-spring of our very existence!

Man needs God and in the light of faith is able to lead a meaningful and useful life.

The Incarnation of the Son of God is the centre and the horizon of the created universe, the pivotal point of our world and the unique event which has forever marked everything that has come into existence, exists or will ever exist.

The Incarnation was possible because Mary said “yes” to God’s will. She was free to accept or to refuse.

The birth of Christ is light and joy, promise and hope, expectation and fulfillment, greatness and humility, silent eloquence and jubilant amazement, warmth and harmony, total abandonment to God’s will and indescribable love for our humanity. Indescribable love!

Merry Christmas!



Build up each other

You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of their ignorance that is in them due to hardening of their hearts.

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

You, however, do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful to building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph. 4, 17-32)

Christmas Carols

The traditional Christmas Carols have always had a strong theological content and were based on a healthy popular piety.

Through the influence of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the 13th century, the Christmas Carols receive wide acceptance and become an inseparable part of the Christmas season.

However, in England, in 1694, the Puritan Oliver Cromwell forbids by law any celebration of Christmas, as well as many other religious feasts. Consequently the Christmas Carols were also forbidden.

The law was lifted only in 1660.

In Northern America a similar law was in force in 1651.

Only in 1831 became Christmas a public holiday in America, first in the States of Louisiana and Arkansas!

The Christian People, however, continued to sing the Carols throughout those difficult times, in secret, in the privacy of their homes.

History teaches us that whenever the Church and her institutions have been threatened, through oppression and persecutions, her children got strengthened. And they, finally, triumph, for no-one can take away from God's People the joy which is within them.

First Christmas documented



The first written reference to the feast day of Christmas is found in the "Chronicler", a manuscript of the 4th century, circa 354 A.D.

In Rome the feast dates back to the year 330, during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great.

At first it was only a local feast on Vatican hill, celebrated at the contemporary basilica of Saint Peter which Constantine built there.

Its purpose was to direct the honour and the worship toward Christ, in juxtaposition to the popular practices of paying homage —at the same hill, to various eastern deities.

The date of December 25th, on purpose, coincided with the pagan festival of "Solus Invictis", i.e. "the undefeated Sun", in an effort to propose the Christian ethos and morals to an expiring paganism.

In the East, namely in Egypt, Christmas was celebrated on January 6th along with the Baptism of the Lord and the Miracle at Cana.

Did you know...

The word **Christmas** is derived from two words, **Christ** and **Mass**.

There have been variations of the two words throughout the centuries, but originally it was **Christus, Latin for Christ** and **Missa, Latin for Mass**, i.e. the celebration of the Eucharist.

It always has been a great and joyful feast, placed near the winter solstice, at the point in time when the days begin to get longer and the nights shorter..

It is interesting to note that the Church placed the feast of John the Baptist's birthday on June 24th, at the time of the summer solstice, when the days start to get shorter and the days longer.

The theme of light and darkness is a universal theme contrasting good and evil, salvation and damnation, life and death, virtue and vice, fullness and emptiness and so on.

However, the reason Saint John the Baptist's birthday is on the 24th of June is based on what he himself said regarding his work for Christ "He must increase, I must decrease" (*John, 3, 30*).

His words express the attitude of every Christian, i.e. to have Christ in the centre of his life and to proclaim Him to the world, remaining himself little and humble before His majesty and holiness..

Man, free to relate



The question on the human being: "***What is man that you are mindful of him?***" (*Psalm 8: 5*) resonates in the Bible from its very first pages, and has accompanied all the journey of Israel and of the Church.

To this question, the Bible itself offered an anthropological answer, which is already outlined in Genesis and runs through all of the Revelation, developing around the fundamental elements of **relationship and freedom**.

Science and technology have helped us further the boundaries of knowledge of nature and, in particular, of the human being. But they alone are not enough to provide all the answers.

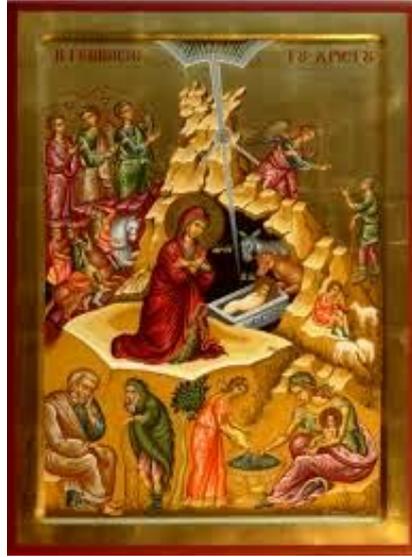
Today, we increasingly realize that it is necessary to draw on the treasures of wisdom preserved in religious traditions, popular wisdom, literature and the arts, which touch the depths of the mystery of human existence, not forgetting, but rather rediscovering those contained in philosophy and in theology.

The centrality of the human person must be considered an end and not a means.

Scientific and technological progress serve the good of all humanity, and their benefits cannot be of advantage only to a few.

Not all that is technically possible or feasible is ethically acceptable.

Three Christmas hymns



Your nativity, o Christ our God, has shed the light of knowledge upon the world. Through it, those who had been star worshippers learned through a star to worship You, o Son of Justice, and to recognize in You the One who rises and who comes from on high. O Lord, glory to You!

O Little Child lying in a manger, by means of a star, heaven has called and led to You the Magi, the first-fruits of the Gentiles, astounded to behold, not scepters and thrones, but extreme poverty. What, indeed, is lower than a cave? O Lord, glory to You! What is humbler than swaddling clothes-and yet the splendour of your dignity shone forth in them resplendently. O Lord, glory to You!

Today the Virgin gives birth to the One who surpasses all essences, and the earth offers a cave to God, the Inaccessible One. Angels sing his glory with the shepherds: for to us is born a Child, God in all eternity.

(Christmas hymns from the Eastern Church)

Remembering—Don't be afraid!

The Christian life does not begin today: it continues today.

Remembering is “to recall everything,” the good and the bad, without covering up or hiding anything. You don't understand the Christian life, even the spiritual life of each day, without memory. Not only do you not understand: You can't live in a Christian way without memory. The memory of the salvation of God in my life, the memory of my troubles in my life.

“But how has the Lord saved me from these troubles?” Memory is a grace: a grace to ask for. ‘Lord, may I not forget your presence in my life, may I not forget the good moments, also the ugly; the joys and the crosses.’ The Christian is a man of memory.

Live at all times in the present -which is not always pretty, with courage and patience.

Just as one cannot live a Christian life without memory of the steps taken, one cannot live a Christian life without looking to the future with hope... of the encounter with the Lord.

Saint Paul urges us not to commit the sin that takes away memory, hope, courage, and patience: faintheartedness. The fainthearted, are those “who always go backward, who guard themselves too much, who are afraid of everything. It is a sin that doesn’t allow us to go forward, through fear. But Jesus says “Don’t be afraid.”

(Pope Francis, Jan. 2017)