



Christmas 2017

HOMILY

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. On those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death a light has shone" (Is 9:2).

As we gather in our beautiful cathedral to celebrate our Christmas Mass, I would like to use these words from the prophet Isaiah to guide our reflections, not only while we are here in the Cathedral but also in those quiet moments which, in the midst of the busyness of Christmas Day, we might be able to create for ourselves.

Christmas is a time of joy, of feasting, of fun - and so it should be. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus and there is no greater reason for rejoicing than that. But there is a danger that this feasting and this fun might only be superficial, a fleeting moment of escape from the sometimes difficult and even demoralising circumstances of our daily lives, and of the society in which we live. The darkness and the shadow of death of which the prophet Isaiah speaks are not hard to identify in our world. On our television screens, on our computer screens, in our newspapers and on our radios we are constantly exposed to the horrors which are the daily experience of so many countless thousands of people around the world. Tonight we will sing of joy to the world and peace on earth but we know that so many people will experience no joy and no peace as Christmas Day unfolds. And of course this is equally true for many people in our own country, our own state of Western Australia, and our own city. Many of these people are visible to us, and we thank God that through our own Catholic agencies and so many other groups and organisations in our community, such people will not be forgotten on Christmas Day. But it is also the case that many of these people are invisible, trapped in isolation and loneliness.

In reality this darkness and deathly shadow spoken of by the prophet may be closer than we realise. It may be the hidden experience of our next door neighbour, of our spouse, of our parents, of our children. It may even be the hidden, and perhaps not fully acknowledged, reality of our own heart. What we see on the surface of people's lives, and what we ourselves share with others, including those closest to us, may be little more than a mask put on to hide the reality. The fun and feasting of Christmas Day may enable us to escape from this reality for a brief time, but is this really all that the feast of Christmas offers us?

The answer of course is "no". Christmas offers us so much more. It offers us the assurance that each one of us, in our struggles, and our limitations, and our frailty and brokenness, as well as in our gifts and talents, is deeply loved and cherished by the God who gave us the gift of life in the first place and who wants us to be able to live this gift joyfully and creatively and serenely.



Christmas offers us the gift of this tiny child, born in Bethlehem, who through his short life will unveil for us the beauty and power and compassion which shine on the face of our Heavenly Father. Christmas offers us, in this same child, the revelation of what a truly decent, fully human life looks like: what we ourselves are called to and what his grace can bring about in us. In other words Christmas offers us the way to see our deepest dreams realised, our deepest hopes fulfilled.

All this comes to us as a gift. It is freely offered to us by our Heavenly Father, wrapped up if you like in the wrapping paper of our Church. The wrapping paper might be looking a little creased or even a bit grubby and it might even be torn in places, but we can still receive the gift gratefully and take the wrapping paper off to see what lies beneath. And what lies beneath, of course, is the gift of Jesus himself. If we take hold of the gift offered to us through the Church, if we examine it carefully and begin to make use of it - if we in other words begin to make space for the Lord Jesus in our daily lives - we will, perhaps slowly but nevertheless unfailingly, be transformed, and our relationships will be healed. The joy and peace of Christmas will no longer be a passing thing which disappears as Christmas Day turns into Boxing Day, but something that begins to grow within us and becomes the foundation of a new way of living which enriches our lives and the lives of those around us.

May we all be ready to receive this great gift which the Lord offers us today. May the light of which the prophet speaks shine into the darkness of our lives and set us free - free to love God and, in God, to love all those God has entrusted to us.

May the peace and joy of Christmas be with you all.