

Christmas 2016

December 24, 2016 Mass in Vigil 4:00 pm

Vigil Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Matt. 1:18-25

We Americans love to travel. With over 54,000 hotels in these United States, containing over 5,000,000 rooms, we are seemingly perpetually on the move. We have 9000 rooms right here in the Twin Cities. So you can imagine my surprise when, nearly 25 years ago, I learned a very good lesson. I had been visiting my brother who was living in Chicago and decided to pay a visit to someone I knew who was extremely ill in Peoria. It was a 2 1/2 hour drive.

I left Chicago quite late in the afternoon. Trouble is I had made no reservation, very atypical of me, but I could not imagine that there would be a problem. Well, there was. John Deere had a convention in town and every place at which I stopped was filled. This was before I owned a cell phone and I was stuck driving to motel after motel- each and every one was filled.

The thought occurred that I might be spending the night in my car. Now after 10:00 p.m., I was out of options...so I did what any good priest would do- I looked for the nearest steeple. As it turns out, it was the Cathedral and I slowly walked up the sidewalk, hesitated, started to walk back to the car, and then changed my mind again and rang the doorbell before I changed it again. My heart was pumping, as I knew that I was troubling someone whom I had never met. Though not the Year of Mercy, they still let me in. The bishop lived there and greeted me. I'll never repeat the mistake again.

But now put your self in the place of Joseph and Mary. Say whatever you want about roles within a family, but I assure you that no man wants to be in a position in which he looks like a failure...Joseph wanted to provide and in his mind, he fell short. The manger upon which we love to gaze is in fact is a rough stone feeding trough.

It is a place where animals stand to feed themselves. It only became a makeshift crib when Mary and Joseph placed some straw and wrapped the child to keep Jesus warm. God wanted to make sure that the true meaning of Christmas was never lost. As much as we all love to adore the Christ Child in the manger, there was nothing spectacular about anything surrounding the birth of Jesus.

He was born in total simplicity- no frills, and no publicity. In fact, at the time, hardly anyone even noticed. Perhaps the Lord wanted us to know that the only important thing we need to know is that Jesus, our Savior was born. Our Savior loved us so much that he came among us to be with us forever. There was no room at the inn.

What is the meaning of this insignificant detail in the midst of the Christmas story? There is little doubt that Joseph felt like he had failed, for he had not provided in time of need. If we too find ourselves disappointed in our failures, in the myriad ways we fall short, this evening reminds us that all doubt and disappointment is swallowed up in God's loving embrace of each and everyone of us.

Despite our unworthiness, our Savior has come into the world. Do not concern yourselves with your failures, real or perceived. A single question will suffice tonight:

Could the Holy Family find room today at the Inn of your heart?

Before receiving Holy Communion this evening, we will all say, "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed. Our Opening Hymn called all the faithful to come to Bethlehem, joyful and triumphant. However, it does not definitively answer the question, namely: Have we made room for Jesus right here, right now?

To do this in a real and substantial way is to invite him to transform the darkness in which at times we are trapped, it means to strip away

our blinders so that we truly see the Lord in the person of the stranger, the refugee, the person in school who really bugs you, maybe even teases you. To see in your siblings that family ties count, even taking precedence over friends.

Have we become so enamored with our own success or even the pursuit of success that we have lost time to welcome Jesus in our midst? We have our plans and dreams and do not take lightly anyone or anything that upsets those plans. But truly welcoming Jesus into our hearts is much more than a slogan- it is our very way of life. We need to put aside our comforts, our desires and plans, and instead form them according to His plan.

This night is above all about Jesus, not us. It is Jesus' birthday, and nothing can obscure or overshadow this.

Yes, we ought to adore Him in the manger in the BVM Chapel; yes, we should gaze up at the outdoor crèche from John Ireland Blvd. But in doing so, a simple question needs to be answered- are we making a place for him today, right here, right now?

Christians in Aleppo Syria, one of the most ancient communities in the Church, have suffered tremendously, forced to leave behind everything but the clothes on their backs. And yet, to whom did the Savior first appear but to the humble and the lowly, the shepherds and the animals. They were the first witnesses to salvation.

The Lord left his glory behind him and has occupied the poverty of the crib, the poverty of our human condition—not too prove anything, as if God needs to prove anything to us—but out of sheer love. God became man so that we might become more like God.

Tonight, all of our concerns and problems, disappointments and failures—these all may be placed before the Crib, and laid there to rest, at least for now. For to us a Savior has been born in our midst, and He came to bring light to all the darkness of our lives.