

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



On Christmas Eve Pope Francis celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, he celebrated not only for 10,000 in attendance, but also for the 1.2 billion Catholics around the world, leading them into Christmas for the fourth time since his election in 2013.

He gave a beautiful homily in which he said:

"...the Gospel reveals a paradox: it speaks of the emperor, the governor, the mighty of those times, but God does not make himself present there; he does not appear in the grand hall of a royal palace, but in the poverty of a stable; not in pomp and show, but in the simplicity of life; not in power, but in a smallness which surprises. In order to discover him, we need to go there, where he is: we need to bow down, humble ourselves, make ourselves small. The Child who is born challenges us: he calls us to leave behind fleeting illusions and go to the essence, to renounce our insatiable claims, to abandon our endless dissatisfaction and sadness for something we will never have. It will help us to leave these things behind in order to rediscover in the simplicity of the God-child, peace, joy and the meaning of life.

"Jesus was born rejected by some and regarded by many others with indifference. Today also the same indifference can exist, when Christmas becomes a feast where the protagonists are ourselves, rather than Jesus; when the lights of commerce cast the light of God into the shadows; when we are concerned for gifts but cold towards those who are marginalized".

He then added in unscripted remarks: *"This worldliness and materialism has taken Christmas hostage. It needs to be freed."*

His words reminded me of a conversation I had with a college freshman, home from college for Christmas. In one of her philosophy classes, she was asked to critique students' motives for going to college in the first place. She found that many of them didn't know, except that they wanted to make as much money as possible in the future.

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The deepest longing within many of these young people, she said, seemed to remain unfulfilled. There is a longing, a desire, she said, that cannot be fulfilled just by material things. She saw a generation that had been swept up in the materialism that society pushes upon us.

The **deepest longing** she spoke of is within each one of us. This longing can only be satisfied in one place, by one person alone. As the Holy Father said at the conclusion of his Christmas homily:

“Let us allow ourselves also to be challenged tonight by Jesus. Let us go to him with trust, from that area in us we feel to be marginalized, from our own limitations. Let us touch the tenderness which saves. Let us draw close to God who draws close to us, let us pause to look upon the crib, and imagine the birth of Jesus: light, peace, utmost poverty, and rejection. Let us enter into the real Nativity with the shepherds, taking to Jesus all that we are, our alienation, our unhealed wounds. Then, in Jesus we will enjoy the flavor of the true spirit of Christmas: the beauty of being loved by God. With Mary and Joseph we pause before the manger, before Jesus who is born as bread for my life. Contemplating his humble and infinite love, let us say to him: thank you, thank you because you have done all this *for me*”.

This weekend we continue to celebrate the answer to our deepest longings, as we end 2016 and begin the New Year 2017 with the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God. We begin the new year with The Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Our Mother. She intercedes for us, that we may leave behind fleeting illusions and go to the essence, renouncing our insatiable claims, abandoning our endless dissatisfaction and sadness, leaving these things behind in order to rediscover in the simplicity of the God-child, peace, joy and the meaning of our life.

Peace in Christ, and Happy New Year, Fr. Sean