

[Spirituality](#)



A Sri Lankan man cleans straw to be used for the roofing of his Nativity mangers to be sold during the Christmas season near Colombo Dec. 15, 2017. (CNS/EPA//M.A. Pushpa Kumara)



by Thomas Gumbleton

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Now we'll reflect for a few moments on these sacred Scriptures and this great mystery that we celebrate this evening. I'm sure many of you remember that there are, in fact, three separate sets of readings for Christmas because we can celebrate a Mass at midnight as we're doing here, then we have what we call the Shepherd's Mass early in the morning, and then the Mass during the day. Each of these liturgies have three separate readings so that we try to get the full scope of the mystery that we celebrate when God breaks into human history, God's Son becomes one of us, a part of our human family.

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) - Mass During the Night

Isaiah 9:1-6

Psalms 96:1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13

2 Thessalonians 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

[Full text of the readings](#)

One of the things that we want to know is why. Why does this love of God, why is it so overwhelming, that God takes this initiative to enter into our human history? Well, the Mass for the day, the second reading is taken from the letter to the Hebrews. I think that this explains as well as anything why God sent Jesus to be one of us. In that letter to the Hebrews, the writer starts off, "God has spoken in the past to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways, although never completely. But in our times God has spoken definitively to us through his son, Jesus."

What that says to us is that Jesus came to be a message, to be the very Word of God in our midst. In fact, if you go to the beginning of the Gospel of St. John, you find written, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing came to be. Whatever has come to be found life in him." And the Word, God's Word, was made flesh, became part of our human family to speak to us about God, to show us who God is, to show us how we, when share in this life of God given

to us through Jesus, must try to live ourselves.

If we listen to Jesus speaking to us in that story from Luke's Gospel tonight, one of the things we must notice, if we listen carefully, is that God has a special love for the poor. Who were the first ones to receive the message about the birth of this special person in Bethlehem? It was the shepherds. Now when we look at our crib scene, we make the shepherds look very clean and neat. But they were, in fact, considered to be almost like outcasts. They were poor. They were living on the countryside because that's the only place they had to stay and live with their sheep and travel with their sheep. They were the poor; they were the outcasts. They were the first ones to hear the message, and they came quickly to see the Son of Man, who is also Son of God.

Throughout his life, Jesus continued to proclaim that message of God's special love for the poor. I can think of many instances in the Gospels where Jesus reaches out to a poor person, but in a very gentle, loving, interested way. Jesus never acts in a superior way looking down upon a person because the person is poor. Think of the scene of Bartimaeus, the blind man. This is toward the end of the public life of Jesus. A great crowd is following him. He's on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem. On the edge of that crowd is a poor, blind beggar, crying out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"

Do you know what the bystanders did? They tried to quiet him down, push him aside because he was poor; he was vulnerable; he didn't count for anything. What did Jesus do? He called the man, "Come to me." So Bartimaeus went to Jesus. Jesus wanted to interact with him. He wasn't just a poor, blind man, he was a real person to Jesus who had dignity, who was to be respected and loved. How does Jesus interact? He doesn't presume he knows what the man needs. He says, "What do you want?" He respects the person — poor, blind, beggar, outcast, on the fringe of the crowd, but Jesus draws him to himself.

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Jesus is teaching us; this is the Word of God. How do we treat the poor in our midst? On an individual level, I'm sure many of us reach out and try to do better in our relationships with the poor. But I'm not so sure we always really make it personal.

It's easier to write a check, to give money to the St. Vincent De Paul Society rather than interacting and getting to know the people. That takes a lot more effort and shows a lot more respect.

But we also seem not to have a care for the poor when we're writing our national legislation. We have the biggest tax cut in history, but who benefits most of all? The rich, not the poor. It's very clear: The rich get richer; the poor get poorer. Jesus has brought us this message: God loves the poor. If we only realized it, every one of us, whatever we have, it's a gift from God. That's why we should always be willing to share what we have, try to make sure everyone has a full human life.

The message of Jesus is spoken very clearly at the moment of his birth and throughout his life: to love the poor, serve the poor. But there's another message (and I could go on to many messages), but just one other that I think is so important when we try to hear this Word of God spoken through Jesus. When the angels sang out, they proclaimed peace on earth. Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. He came to bring peace into our world. There's only one way to bring peace and it's not through violence or war, being the strongest nation on Earth with the most terrible weapons we have available, ready to use them.

No, that's not bringing peace. Jesus teaches us how to bring peace. "You have heard that it was said of old, 'Thou shall not kill,' but I say to you, you must not even be angry with your brother or sister. In fact, if you recognize that you have offended someone, someone has something against you, and you're bringing your gift to the altar to offer worship to God, there you remember that someone has something against you,' what is Jesus saying, 'Leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled. Only then come back and offer your gift.' " Reconciliation, reaching out in forgiveness, understanding, and love to all others — other individuals, other families, other communities, other nations.

The only way to peace in the world is to give up violence and to follow this Jesus who comes to be the Word of God. Thou shall not kill — no, not even be angry. Go first to be reconciled. Then the supreme moment when Jesus teaches us about forgiveness and love when he's dying on the cross: "Father, forgive them." This is the spirit we must have in every circumstance of violence, hatred, killing. We need to transform, each of us individually, our own hearts.

We need to bring about a transformation within our nation. That is the only way to peace in the world. We have to become those who hear the words spoken to us tonight by Jesus coming into our midst poor, without weapons, without any worldly goods at all. Jesus shows us the way to peace through the way of love, the way of forgiveness. Only these are of Christ — that is the word he preaches to us as he lies in that manger, but then on throughout his life until he finally gives forth his life on the cross forgiving those putting him to death.

We live in a very dangerous time of history. There is great violence, suffering and killing going on in our world, and we are part of it. It happens within our country in terrible ways. It all could change if we take Jesus, the Word of God, listen to what he says, watch how he acts, and follow him. Then that song of the angels will be fulfilled. There will be peace on Earth among all people of good will.

In the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Homily given Dec. 25, 2017, at St. Philomena, Detroit, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]