

Christmas – Mass at Night

Throughout the year but at Christmas above all the Church's preachers are charged with proclaiming the good news. You might say that at Christmas the Church is charged with bringing its best news possible.

The beginning of the Gospel of John, when we have heard tonight, is perhaps the best place in all of Scripture to start. Of course, there is very good news proclaimed on Easter Sunday and in the Holy Days that precede it, but John begins his gospel with news that makes us even more amazed, and calls us to even greater gratitude.

It's understandable that the message of Christ dying for our sins would be the part of the Christian message that so often takes the forefront of attention. After all, it is a message addressed to us particularly in the dire circumstances of our need for salvation.

St. John, however, would like for us to use as the starting point for the mystery of salvation, not the fact of human sinfulness, but the fact of God's overflowing love. Instead of basing everything on the notion that God saved us because we needed saving—as if Jesus would not have been born of Adam had not sinned—John bases everything on how central God's desire to share love with his creation is to the understanding of all that God offers.

The Word which dwelt among us, God's Son, came to take away our sin as part of the concrete process of inviting us into the very life of God. From the very beginning that was the

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original intention, not an afterthought when we had gotten ourselves caught in the throes of death.

Only such a desire can account for the completeness with which Jesus completed his task, not only dying for us, but in the process teaching us what it means to be truly human, offering us a place at the table in the kingdom, and above all else, ascending to the Father so that we could receive the Holy Spirit and be adopted into the very family of God.

The life of the Spirit, which the Holy Spirit makes possible in our lives, is the best gift that flows from the events that begin in the stable in Bethlehem. That life is nothing less than God living within us, making us his own, and putting us on the path of full and eternal participation in the divine community that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have shared “from the beginning.”

It would be appropriate if a message at Christmas addressed us in the mire of the brokenness of our world, but it would never be enough. Our salvation goes beyond all that. It is anchored in nothing less than the eternal desire of God that, whatever the circumstances of our lives, we know we are loved by him, created by him for that very reason.

This awesome mystery can only be pondered and received gratefully and allowed to work the miracle of its grace—in our hearts first, but welling out from there to bless and change the world. Nothing else will do.