

## Christmas Eve

When I was a boy, during the summer when other kids were enjoying uninterrupted freedoms, my parents told their six children we each had to spend one hour each day reading a book. Now, to this day all six of us enjoy reading. As we grew up we assumed the reason for this requirement was to sustain our education through the months when school was idle. But Mom told us later she had a different goal in mind: She just wanted a little peace and quiet every day.

“Peace on earth” is the message a multitude of angels proclaims in the gospel we hear every Christmas. Yet every Christmas we are well aware that peace does not reign over many parts of the earth. This year even the Holy Land suffers war. Some families suffer violence, unsettling words, or a terrible silence between some of its members. Yet to this world and to these families, the angels announce peace—not a wish for peace but a declaration of peace.

Peace and beauty abound throughout the world and in our families. But peace is not newsworthy as war. As the saying goes about the media: “No news is bad news. Bad news is good news. Good news is no news.”

The word “gospel” means “good news,” so to us Christians the good news is good news.

St. Paul makes this point in his Letter to Titus. We don’t often refer to this epistle, but the Church has assigned the verses of today’s second reading to Christmas Mass for hundreds of years. It opens with this declaration: “The grace of God has appeared.” Mary and Joseph could have spoken these words at the manger: “The grace of God has appeared.” The message resembles the one the angels gave, declaring peace on earth. Good news is already here. But like drivers slowing down to look at an accident instead of marveling at the voluminous safe flow of the rest of traffic, we focus on the aspects of life that need grace: the bad news that explains why the good news feels so good.

And for Paul, more good news is coming: a second “appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.” Some people fear the Second Coming of Christ, but Paul calls it “the blessed hope,” a phrase we repeat at every Mass right after the Lord’s Prayer. The priest asks God to grant peace in our days “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ.”

Paul’s message explains why this grace has appeared, why Christ was born: He came to train us “to reject godless ways and worldly desires.” He invites us to spread peace as we await the blessed hope, “to live temperately, justly and devoutly in this age as we await the blessed hope.”

Christmas invites us to live temperately, justly and devoutly. When we avoid excesses in our feasting, when we treat others with fairness, when we devoutly practice our faith, we spread peace on earth. Christmas does not ignore the troubles of the world. It shines hope upon them.

Our families need peace. Our world needs peace. Let’s continue the work the birth of Christ began: Let’s be peace to all we meet this Christmas Day.

Sunday, December 24, 2023