

From the Pastors Desk:

The liturgical cycle of the Roman Catholic Church repeats itself yet again, for today we find ourselves celebrating anew the great and glorious feast of the Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the glorious feast of Christmas, the Nativity of our Lord! This glorious feast of Christmas is when the heavenly choirs of angels announce to all the world that our Messiah has come, Jesus is born. This glorious feast of Christmas is when the messages of the Old Testament Prophets are brought to fulfillment. This glorious feast of Christmas is when the prophetic voice of John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness is fulfilled. This glorious feast of Christmas is when the depth of God's unconditional love for all people is made visible. This glorious feast of Christmas is when the dazzling and blinding star of Bethlehem fills the night sky, radiating across the entire face of the earth. This glorious feast of Christmas is when people of faith "return home".

I am not speaking here of returning home to church, the building, although it is always an emotionally moving experience for me to see the church filled at Christmas with people whose faces shine brightly with the joy of Christmas, and the excited voices of children echo throughout the church. I am speaking here of returning home to our roots, returning to that place within our hearts and souls that defines who we are and who God has called us to be. Christmas is indeed that glorious feast when we "re-discover" who Christ is for us as people of faith by annually celebrating His nativity. Christmas finds us standing before the nativity scene of Bethlehem in our annual "re-discovery" of who we are as people created in the image and likeness of our God.

One of my favourite authors is freelance writer Carol Luebering; she often writes about re-discovering who we are at Christmas as we gather at the dinner table for our Christmas meal. Here is where stories are told; here is where people reconnect with family and friends; here is where the warmth of family helps us to feel safe and loved; here is where traditional foods bring us back to earlier days – perhaps even our own childhood; here is where the smells and sounds of Christmas call us to ponder who we are because of God's love for us made visible by family and friends – the faces of Christ in our lives. Yet as Luebering goes on to say, it is in fact not the meal itself, but the people at table who bring these feelings to the surface. Not even the best of turkeys (my all-time favourite food),

geese or hams can do this, for as she says "*There is simply no seasoning like good company*".

Or ponder what the author Garrison Keillor, the author of the Lake Wobegon stories, has to say. Keillor speaks of Christmas as returning home from "exile" in order to re-discover who we are. Like one of the characters, Corinne Ingqvist, who returns home for Christmas as a successful teacher, only to discover that it is not teaching that defines who she is but rather family, friends, and faith. Or the character Richard who returns home as a successful and rich businessman only to discover that family and friends are more interested in him than his wealth, thereby helping him to re-discover who he truly is. Or Eddie, who is afraid that his wife is going to leave him for someone better until he re-discovers that he is worthy of being loved. These characters all re-discover their true identity by returning home for Christmas. Keillor concludes that it is faith that makes all this possible.

Perhaps you might have read a few years ago the popular book by Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, where he asks the question *what happened to me?* Christmas is the time to ask this question, to re-discover who we are, particularly as people of faith. To ponder deeply the other questions that Albom asks: *Have you found someone to share your heart with? ... Are you giving to your community? ... Are you at peace with yourself? ... Are you trying to be as human as you can be?* Christmas – the time to return home and re-discover.

The great preacher, Father William Bausch, when pondering Albom's questions says: "*For Christmas asks not only what happened to me, but Christmas gives the answer: whatever happened, whatever you've become, whatever your motive for being here, there is a God so madly in love with you that this God could not tolerate any distancing but came and dwelt among us, took on our human condition and not only taught us how to live by being compassionate, forgiving and self-sacrificing, but showed us the way*".

Sometimes our returning home for Christmas can take a rather winding road, catching us by surprise. John Grisham reminds us of this in his book *Skipping Christmas*. In this story Luther and Nora Krank, after seeing their daughter Blair off on Peace Corps, which will

cause her to not be home for Christmas, decide to skip Christmas and go on a Caribbean cruise. The Krank's, after planning their cruise and doing everything they possibly could to avoid Christmas, sometimes in very comical fashion, hear from Blair – she will be home for Christmas after-all. In the act of welcoming home their daughter for Christmas, instead of going on a cruise, the Krank's discover you can not skip Christmas. The Krank's remind us that Christmas is a part of the very fabric of who we are, it defines us, it makes us whole, it makes us vulnerable enough to be loved by others, it brings us joy – it cannot be skipped! This was brought home to the Krank's when they welcomed home their daughter Blair for Christmas.

I pray this great and glorious feast of Christmas leads you home to re-discover who you truly are and who God has truly called you to be as you stand in the light of the star of Bethlehem. Perhaps rather than say to all of you, “Merry Christmas”, let me rather be the first to say to you **WELCOME HOME!**

On behalf of the staff of Saint Francis:

Miss Ruthann Fisher, Mrs. Terriane Moulton, Ms. Alice Soeder, Mr. Gary Howell, Mr. David O'Farrell, Mr. Doug O'Farrell, Mrs. Anna Szabo,
and myself, *Father Tim Uniac, CR.*

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*Jesus
is born*

*For unto you is born...a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11*