

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Almost a year ago, I read a small book entitled *God in the Eternal Present* by the Reverend Carl G. Howie. Reverend Howie was a World War II chaplain and Presbyterian minister, including at the historic Calvary Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. In the chapter, “Rendezvous with God,” Howie had written something that immediately caused me to highlight this thought with a yellow marker and red pen. As I reflect these many months later in preparation for the season of Christmas, the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I harkened back to these words.

“A faith which relates only to some climactic event in history and does not alter the quality of living here and now is not the Christian faith. Our eyes must be on the ‘here and now,’ not on the far-off sweet tomorrow. Except we be possessed by God in this our daily life there will be no ‘land that is fairer than day.’ Except we lend our minds, our hearts, and our hands to the service of God there shall be no blissful life beyond. For the *faith that saves is a faith that submits and serves*. Let no one ever make the mistake of thinking that we are in God’s vestibule waiting to meet Him; we are already in the arena where He is. If we have the eyes of faith which Christ gives, we have met Him.

“Meet God not someday far away; meet Him from day to day as He is an active agent in renewing life and directing it. Meet Him as He rebukes and as He encourages you. Meet God in simple service and kind helpfulness. Meet God as you become a part of His purpose for all people. Meet God here and now in submission and in service. Thus meeting Him you can never be separated from Him.”

These sublime words help to capture the essence of the Incarnation, God dwelling with us as a man in our midst. Emmanuel, “God with us,” speaks of an intimacy which God so desires to share with us. As John’s Gospel expresses: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” We see unfolding before us the mystery of salvation history; Jesus Christ was the beginning and now enters into the finiteness of human experience to be the light which casts out darkness and guides us - gentle light - towards the things of heaven.

I believe that Christmas is met with a certain poignancy this year. The Covid-19 pandemic has really forced us to examine some of the presuppositions we hold about our priorities and the things that give meaning and purpose to our lives. Additionally, many of us lost close family members and friends in 2020. Through it all, we have been utterly dependent upon God to guide us, to fortify us with the grace to “keep on keeping on.” Our own experience brings us to a better appreciation and understanding of what Mary and Joseph must have been going through when they brought their son into a dangerous and uncertain world. That reality was not lost on them; and yet, they kept faith and fulfilled the greatest mission ever entrusted to two people: to bring the Son of God into the world.

As we contemplate and celebrate the coming of God into our lives this Christmas time, please be assured of my love and prayers for each of you. May the light of Christ enflame our hearts with the fire of His Love and pass that light onto others. In every generation, prophets and heralds of the Good News that God is indeed in our midst, speak with a certain urgency. Our time is no different. We are compelled to preach God’s message of salvation with clarity and conviction, knowing that the Truth lies within the Son of God. May we begin to this anew in our own hearts, then with our family and friends and then to the world beyond.

I pray your time with family and friends will bring you much joy and happiness. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

The Starlight Night

Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

“Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves’-eyes!
The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!
Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!
Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farmyard scare!
Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize.

Buy then! bid then! - What? - Prayer, patience, alms, vows.
Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!
Look! March-blook, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows!
These are indeed the barn, withindoors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.”

Fr. Tom