

## Homily for Christmas 2022 Year A

Today we have come with joyful and humble hearts to gather together around the Altar and the Crib to celebrate another Christmas Day.

It is a time when we become conscious of how quickly time passes. It hardly seems like a year since last Christmas, but it is.

We have survived another whole year of ups and downs, joys and sadness, war and peace, and now we step aside from all the rush and busyness of the past few days for a special act of adoration.

For most of us perhaps, it has been a hard and busy year, but all those things can be blessings in themselves.

For some it has been a year of loss and parting. They have been called upon to give those that they love back to Almighty God, and it is at this time of the year that we miss them the most.

For some it has been a year of receiving: new friends, a marriage, a new life in the family.

In all, some 365 days of both giving and receiving, and now we take a little time out to learn once again the valuable lesson that it all must be done in a spirit of Joy.

Joy is part of the fundamental message of Christmas. The Joy that we now experience and celebrate is the ineffable mystery of the love of God for us in the gift of his Son, and in turn our reception of Him.

All the giving and the receiving of presents that will go on today is but a poor repetition and imitation of that historical event some 2000 years ago.

The prayers of the Church for those past four weeks of Advent have been a constant cry to the Lord to come, and to come quickly, and now all that waiting and praying has come to completion.

Christ has come to us and is present with us. The gift once given is given again. The whole mystery has been reborn in our hearts. And what a mystery! The all-powerful God, the Creator of the Universe, places Himself at the mercy of His creatures, assuming the vulnerability of a child. By His birth He opens for us a window into the inner being of a God who is beyond all imagination, a God of astonishing love and inconceivable generosity and tenderness.

But there is no giving without there also being receiving and sometimes we need to be reminded how to receive.

If the attitude that prompts one to give is met by an attitude of openness to receive, then there is the possibility of real joy in both giver and receiver.

The spirit in which a gift is given should evoke that same spirit in the one who receives it.

God, who is pure love, out of love gave Himself to us in a special way in a stable in Bethlehem long, long ago, and we, human beings, who need all of our lives both to love and be loved, should therefore find it the easiest thing to open ourselves to such a gift.

But we do not always know how to receive and respond, because life sometimes has inflicted deep wounds upon us and we are often too afraid to open ourselves to accept love, to accept God, because we realise it must result in enormous change in ourselves.

If we are open to receive and accept the gift of God's love then we know that our own love is required by God in return.

We place ourselves at the risk of being drawn out of ourselves and all our subtle defences and pulled into the life of God in return.

God cannot ever be outdone in His generosity, no matter how generous or complete our gifts and our giving maybe. We will always receive in return much much more than we can ever give.

We are now living in what is very much a post Christian society, and genuine Christian living is sadly a decreasing phenomenon.

But for Christians, our openness and love and self-giving to God is inextricably linked to an openness, love and self-giving to our fellow man, together with all the risks of misunderstanding and rejection that can go with it.

You cannot love God without loving your fellow man, but our fellow man sometimes makes that so very hard, and we tooo sometimes make it hard for our fellow man to love us back.

All the hate, suspicion, disunity, misery, and death which human beings suffer and inflict upon each other outside of these four walls, results from a breakdown of communication between them.

That mutual complement of giving and receiving that is part of the spirit of Christmas, breaks down in practise in our lives.

We are all too often so quick to give of ourselves and our opinions; but there is no real openness there to receive, to listen to, to absorb, to respect the beliefs and opinions and wishes of another. And so there can never be any real peace and unity between men unless we try to balance our giving with the spirit of openness to receive.

Husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and unions, and politicians of all parties.

That twofold aspect of the spirit of Christmas, giving and receiving, must be relived and practised in the daily life of every Christian, after the pattern of Christ himself.

Which is worse, the selfishness of a life that is all receiving and no giving in return, or the impoverishment of a life that is all giving and no receiving? The Christian life must strike a balance.

The journey that we make to the Crib each year, to draw near to worship and to pray, has also been played out in our lives.

We have and we are moving closer to Eternal Joy, and we hardly sense it.

Life is very short, and there are some brief moments when God seems very close to us. Christmas is one of those moments.

Long after you and I are no longer here to celebrate this special day, others will be standing in our places to recall and relive what we are doing now.

The message of Christmas is timeless and eternal.

But this is our time and our Christmas.

God has brought us together again to this special place to freely give us His gifts; peace in our homes and in our hearts, Joy to be alive and living with each other, and the Love of himself and our fellow man.

Who knows where we will be this time next year. It does not really matter because today we remind ourselves that for all eternity Christ is ours and we are His.

The gift given long ago is now given once again, and it is a promise not just for this special day but for all eternity.

At Christmas God approaches us in a special way with open arms. He gives himself totally to us, let us hasten to receive Him.

May I wish you a very happy and holy Christmas and peace and health in the year to come.