

Christmas Homily 2019

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In his Apostolic Letter *Admirabile Signum, On the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity scene*, Pope Francis writes: “The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture.”

Think of your own family crèche set and where you place it in your home. They are “masterpieces of beauty” and symbolize how our Catholic faith is handed down from generation to generation.

Imagine that crèche set emerging from a beautiful open Bible and the various Gospels the Church presents to us on Christmas – the 1st Chapter of Matthew from the Christmas Vigil Mass, the 2nd Chapter of the Gospel of Luke from the Christmas Midnight Mass, and the 1st Chapter of the Gospel of John from Christmas Day Mass.

Our Christmas creches are living expressions of the Holy Spirit setting our lives on Fire with the inspired Sacred Scriptures.

Pope Francis tells us that “the poor are a privileged part of this mystery” and that “the Nativity scene clearly teaches us that we cannot let ourselves be fooled by wealth and fleeting promises of happiness.”

Every crèche set expresses how the poor, the ignored, the forgotten and the vulnerable are people very much like the Holy Family at the birth of Christ.

Every meditation on a Nativity scene turns upside down any false security in our lives that is founded on power, prestige, wealth, pleasure, ego and any other idols that revolve around the seven capital sins.

Every meditation on a Nativity scene replaces that false and illusory security with the true rock-solid security of Jesus Christ and the Mission of Mercy of his Church.

We remember in a special way this Christmas our responsibility to the vulnerable unborn.

The recent passage of the New York State legislation – the so-called Reproductive Health Act -- permits abortion until the moment of birth and even infanticide for victims of abortion who are born alive.

This tragic legislation reminds us dramatically of our responsibility as Catholics to light every public square in New York with the sanctity of human life logic of the Prince of Peace.

The Roman Empire at the time of Christ's birth similarly treated the vulnerable unborn as unworthy of protection and life, but the Christmas crèche refutes those ideas as it reminds us that each child is the most precious of gifts.

As Pope Francis says, “By being born in a manger, God himself launches the only true revolution that can give hope and dignity to the disinherited and the outcast: the revolution of love, the revolution of tenderness.”

We live this revolution when we remember and stand firmly with the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, the addicted, the mentally ill, those who experience trauma, tragedy and the loss of loved ones, global refugees and immigrants, and survivors of sexual abuse.

This revolution of love is expressed in what Pope Francis calls “everyday holiness, the joy of doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way, born whenever Jesus shares his divine life with us.”

Every figure in our crèche sets expresses this every day holiness. The shepherds teach us receptivity, adoration and simplicity. The three wise men teach us to follow and trust the shooting stars of Christ's guidance.

Joseph teaches us to be wise, just, solid, mature, to put Christ at the center of every dimension of our daily work, and to be open to the Holy Spirit's surprises.

Mary teaches us a single-minded focus on Jesus whether that focus is on Christ in the manger or Christ on the Cross.

In *Christ is Alive*, Pope Francis asks the young people and young adults of the world to commit themselves to this everyday holiness.

He writes: “Through the holiness of the young, the Church can renew her spiritual ardor and her apostolic vigor. The balm of holiness generated by the good lives of so many young people can heal the wounds of the Church and of the world, bringing us back to that fullness of love to which we have always been called: young saints inspire us to return to our first love. (cf. Rev 2:4)”

May the young saints of the world inspire us to return to our first love, a first love so deeply captured by our Nativity Scenes and the Birth of Christ that we celebrate at this Midnight Mass.