

December 25 – Christmas Reflection

By Mary Francis Fletcher, CDP, Provincial Director



For four weeks now, we have pondered God's word to us, God's word given to us in the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures. What has this meant for us in the midst of the rush and busyness of these days and weeks? Have we set aside time to enter contemplatively, reflectively, to open our hearts to the love, the freedom, and the grace that comes to us through Jesus?

At the beginning of this new liturgical year, we were invited into the waiting and preparation, the hoping and anticipation of this season of Advent. We wondered, to what are we called today? Why now are we called to bring Jesus more fully into our world, with whom are we called to be in a deeper, more committed relationship? God is waiting patiently for our response to this call, announced to us by the song of the angels, of "peace on earth to people of good will."

In the Christmas vigil liturgy, the Gospel reminds us of the many generations of ancestors who preceded us in our covenant with God and in our faith traditions. In our Community of Divine Providence, we have been renewing ourselves and reclaiming our own sacred story; we have been remembering the inspirations that gave our founder, Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, and our foundress, Marie de la Roche, with the first Sisters who preceded us, the courage, compassion, fidelity, and trust to seek new ways to help the suffering people of their own day. We've also been recalling God's faithfulness to each of us in our personal lives and to all of us in our communal history. We've sought to listen deeply to the Divine call for us in our own time, in our global village, where we hear every day of loss and struggle, and also witness generosity and care for those in need.

In our homes, we usually celebrate this holy day by remembering family members and enjoying traditions that give us courage and delight, even sometimes in the midst of separation or loss. Like the children we once were, we are excited as we anticipate the surprises that could come to us today. Let us be open to God's ways and the new direction in which we may be led!

In our churches, we sing of God's presence among us, we celebrate the appearance of a great light as we recall the incarnation of God in human form, as one among us, born two thousand years ago. We rejoice in the continuing presence of Jesus among us, Jesus who is present in the light of hope, joy, peace, and love of Christians for others, especially for those whose lives are broken by struggle, suffering, chaos, loneliness, or despair.

Let us remember today that the greatest surprise we have been given by our divine Creator is Jesus' coming to be with us, sent to show us who God is and how to live as the image of God. It is truly awesome that we have received such a wondrous gift, wrapped on this feast in the presence of a tiny child born in a stable, given to us today as a present that is hidden among us in ordinary daily events, unexpected experiences, and the very real encounters of our lives.

The letter to Titus, the second reading of the midnight liturgy, speaks about the transformation to which we are called, a transformation made possible by God's grace, which trains us for purity and justice, to live righteously, to respond to people's needs today.

We are called now to bring Jesus more fully into our world, to allow God to bring conversion to our hearts and spirits, so that we may join other faith-filled people in bringing God's reign to the earth. Our own conversion is impossible unless we enter into a deeper, more committed relationship with Jesus, which leads us to see him in those most in need. The people of our global village need us today. We are called now to speak for the ones who have no voice, to work to assure others the basic necessities of clean water, safe sanitation, sufficient food, and adequate shelter, to strive with others to change oppressive systems that trap people in poverty, and to live nonviolently so that we become freer to work for the peace promised by this child whose birth we celebrate.

We are called today, as never before, to be the gift of God to others, to bring Jesus to birth within ourselves for our world today. God is waiting patiently for our response to this call to fulfill the promise of "peace on earth to people of good will."

If we have not taken time for contemplation and reflection on the joy and peace of this promised gift to each and all of us, this is the first day of the Christmas season, lasting until the Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus' presence to the world through the arrival of the magi. Let us, then, in these days, open our hearts to conversion, to the love, freedom, and grace that comes to us through Jesus! May we celebrate with deep gratitude the gift we have been given, and may we have new courage to give ourselves and our gifts to help others have opportunities for healthy lives of justice and peace today.