

“The time is near of the crowning of the year. Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth, and set the table.” These words from the hymn you will sing at the end of the Mass could reflect the preoccupations of many of you with only four days left till Christmas. How many of you have finished the decorating and the gift shopping? Trying to find the right gift at the right price for the credit card can be frustrating. No wonder some may feel a sense of relief, and sometimes letdown too, when it is all over, when all the wrappings and packaging are out in the trash bin.

The commercialism of the season can draw our attention away from what the season is all about. It is not a pagan celebration of the winter solstice and worship of the sun. Four more days and we will be celebrating a birthday, a very special birthday. What do we usually do to celebrate a birthday? The parents give a party, and those invited bring gifts for the child. Do we ever say to ourselves, ‘Here I am buying gifts for family and friends while I have not thought about a gift for the Christ Child?’ It is sort of like King David saying to Nathan, “Here I am living in a house of cedar while the ark of God dwells in a tent!”

It is not that Jesus needs anything, is it? As Son of God, as creator, he owns the world and all it holds. Yet in his humanity he is poor, born in a stable. As God it is right and just that we offer him worship and praise. Paul also says we should also give him our obedience in faith. Well, what can we offer him as a man-child? He gave us an answer: “What you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me.” Our best gift to one another is compassion for the poor and the weak, both physically and morally weak. We do that concretely by generously sharing our time and resources with others. God loves the cheerful giver. Let’s not forget forgiveness of one another - a very special gift to the Lord. Why? It acknowledges the Lordship over our lives when, having something against a brother or sister, I leave my gift at the altar and go be reconciled first. Then our gift at the altar will be suiting and pleasing to God.

When we are fully aware, fully convinced of the Son of God’ self-emptying to take on our human nature, to suffer and die in order to obtain our forgiveness, then *caritas Christi urget nos* (the love of Christ, i.e., Christ’s love urges us on). We cannot help but want to express our love of him in return.

Mary is our model. What faith it took to believe the message of an angel. First that God had chosen her, a humble country girl, to become the mother of the long awaited Messiah of her people. Second that his conception would happen in such a way unique. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.” We can only bow before that mystery with reverence and awe. Having been assured by the angel that nothing is impossible for God, Mary consented. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

At the visitation her cousin Elizabeth said to her: "Blessed are you who believed that the word spoken to you would be fulfilled." We rightly rejoice with Mary that the Lord who is mighty has done great things for her. Let's remember we too were overshadowed by the Holy Spirit by our baptism and confirmation. In faith we can say that the Lord has done great things for us. "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life." By adopting us as sons and daughters in his Son, and living as witnesses of that adoption, we can hope with confidence to be coheirs with him in his eternal glory.

The Word who was made flesh from Mary 2000 years ago, comes every day in the word proclaimed, in the gathering of the faithful and above all in the Eucharist. By faithfully welcoming him into our homes, i.e. our hearts and minds, we will not be fearful when he comes in glory to judge the living and the dead. To Jesus, Son of Mary and Son of God, our Redeemer, with the Father and the Holy Spirit be praise, thanksgiving, honor and glory now and forever. Amen.