

'THE CHRISTMAS MANGER AND NON-VIOLENCE' - HOMILY – 1 JANUARY 2017

As we read the Old Testament in search of Peace,
We see the graphic details of violence between nations, villages, families, individuals and groups of people.

Yet we also see covenants built on faith and love and respect,
Times of repentance, and acts of goodness.

Through the centuries we see the struggle between good and evil, love and hatred.

WHAT CAN WE DO IN 2017?

Let us turn to the Christmas Event.

THREE times in Ch. 2 of Luke's Gospel, there is mention of "laid" or "lying in the manger".

1. THE BIRTH of JESUS - Luke 2:7

WHO LAID JESUS THERE?

Mary

WHY WAS HE LAID THERE?

Because there was no room for them in the inn.

2. GOD GIVES A MESSAGE AND A SIGN - Luke 2:9-12

WHY DON'T THE SHEPHERDS NEED TO BE AFRAID?

Because God gives good news of great joy.

WHAT IS THE SIGN?

You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger

WHO IS THE 'GOOD NEWS' AND WHEN DOES HE COME?

He is new born Saviour, who is the Christ the Lord, born this day in the city of David.

3. TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE - Luke 2:16-21

WHO DO THE SHEPHERDS FIND AS THEY SEARCH FOR THE 'GOOD NEWS'?

The shepherds hurry to Bethlehem to find Mary and Joseph and the baby
"keimenon in te phatnen" lying in a manger.

WHAT DO THEY SHEPHERDS DO THERE?

They tell what happened to them in the fields – about the Good News.

WHO DO THEY TELL?

All those there at the time.

WHAT IS MARY'S RESPONSE?

She ponders these words in her heart.

There is great depth to the Christmas Event for us.

WE LEARN FROM THE SHEPHERDS ABOUT:

- Not being afraid.
- Listening to the Message of God.
- Seeking out the path that God wants us to go. Our journey to Jesus Christ, Our Saviour.
- Finding God's way in the manger, instead of being tempting to power, prestige, personal gain.
- Rejoicing in our lives because Jesus is the Good News of Great Joy.
- Sharing, witnessing to God in our lives. Telling the story.

WE LEARN FROM MARY OF HER LOVE AND HOLINESS AS A MOTHER TO JESUS:

- Mary would be busy as a mother with a new born child, with little resources, yet in faith, she ponders the events and messages of her life.
- Mary stands out as role model for us as disciples.

HOW DO WE PONDER THE WORK OF GOD IN OUR OWN LIVES AND THOSE AROUND US?

Looking back on this Year of 2016, we saw terrible acts of violence around the world And courageous efforts to make peace.

In 2016 God called us as a human family to love, to build peace, to be courageous, to forgive, to be just and merciful.

While never forgetting that, on the first Christmas, the lowly manger was a sign.

We too ponder in faith where God leads us via the mangers of our world.

We continually heard in 2016, Pope Francis inviting us to mercy by his words, actions and initiatives. Of showing mercy to each other and to creation.

For the past 50 years Popes have issued Peace Messages on New Year's Day. Each time different aspects of peace have been presented.

This Year Pope Francis speaks about nonviolence.

Part of his Message now follows.

"3. Jesus himself lived in violent times.

Yet he taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for "it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come" (Mk 7:21).

But Christ's message in this regard offers a radically positive approach.

He unfailingly preached God's unconditional love, which welcomes and forgives.

He taught his disciples to love their enemies (cf. Mt 5:44) and to turn the other cheek (cf. Mt 5:39).

When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (cf. Jn 8:1-11), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (cf. Mt 26:52), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence.

He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility (cf. Eph 2:14-16).

Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation.

In the words of Saint Francis of Assisi: "As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts".

To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.

As my predecessor Benedict XVI observed, that teaching "is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is too much violence, too much injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with more love, with more goodness.

This 'more' comes from God".

He went on to stress that: "For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone.

Love of one's enemy constitutes the nucleus of the 'Christian revolution'"

The Gospel command to love your enemies (cf. Lk 6:27) "is rightly considered the magna carta of Christian nonviolence.

It does not consist in succumbing to evil..., but in responding to evil with good (cf. Rom 12:17-21), and thereby breaking the chain of injustice" _

With Mary, we ponder the Christmas Manger.
With the Shepherds we journey and tell the Good News.
We are inspired by Mary's love for Jesus, carrying Him in her womb, giving birth, caring and raising Jesus.
And Mary's prayerful humility of pondering God's actions in her life.
Let us ponder the call to love more, with more goodness, to overcome violence and evil.
Beginning within our own hearts. Healed by God's mercy.
Let us find room for others this New Year.

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – The Christmas Manger and Non-Violence – 1 January 2017]
[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/010117.cfm>]
[Pope Francis 50th World Day of Peace 2017 <http://bit.ly/FrancisPeaceMessage>]
[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook01012017>]