
PEACE, JOY, AND HEALTH AT CHRISTMASTIME!



I want to wish each and everyone of you my best wishes on the beautiful occasion of the Christmas feast. May your heart be filled with peace and deep joy. You and your loved ones are in my prayers.

WHERE IS JESUS?

Last summer, a young boy of 6 or 7 asked me many questions: Are you a priest? Do you work? Do you pray? And finally, he suddenly asked, "Where is Jesus Christ?" I answered him, "In your heart." He was surprised with the answer, so he asked, "If I had eyes inside of me, could I see Jesus? Can my dentist see Jesus in me?" It isn't so easy, at times, to answer the questions of a clever young man. *"We do well and always to give thanks to the Father through Jesus Christ. In the wonder of the incarnation, the eternal Word has brought to the eyes of faith a new and radiant vision of his glory. In him we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see."* Since his ascension into heaven, Jesus has been seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will have no end.

THE WORD OF GOD

Not only is Jesus in heaven, but he is also in the Divine Word that we proclaim: he is the Word of God. *"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and women and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man."*

ASSOCIATED WITH EVERY HUMAN BEING

Ever since this incarnation, Jesus has to identify with every human being, especially with the poor and the sick. Where is Jesus? And I answer: With you, with the poor, with the sick. You remember this wonderful page of St. Matthew's Gospel: *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand: 'Come, you that are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*

WITH EYES OF FAITH

Jesus is in heaven; Jesus is in the Word of God; Jesus is in every human being, in the poor, in the sick... Jesus is in every sacrament. We are baptised in the death of Jesus, and in his Resurrection. We are forgiven in Jesus' name. We are nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus... We are confirmed in the Holy Spirit of Jesus. We are united by the love of Jesus. We are ordained a deacon, a priest, a bishop, in order to continue the work of Jesus. In our pain we are intimately united with the Passion of Jesus.

There are many ways of meeting Jesus, but the most important is to have faith enough to know how to recognise him. If I had eyes inside of me, I could see Jesus... Faith is those eyes that allow us to recognise Jesus in the poor, the sick, the sacraments, and the Church.

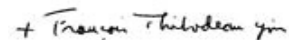
OPENING OUR HEARTS

The most important thing for us, tonight, is to open our hearts to Jesus and welcome him. The most important thing is to recognise him in the people in our community, in the members of our families. The most important thing is to do like the shepherds: to recognise him and to welcome the message of the angels: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours. "When the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and they saw the child lying in the manger, they reported what they made known what they had been told about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen."

CHRISTMAS 1996

This Christmas will be for me an unforgettable experience since I shall have the pleasure of celebrating Christmas Mass with the patients and staff at the Edmundston Regional Hospital, then in the parishes of Anderson Road, Plaster Rock, and Blue Bell, and finally with the Blessed Sacrament Sisters. I shall be taking "réveillon" at the Cathedral rectory. All 15,000 families of our diocese will be in my thoughts and prayers, as also our visitors, benefactors, the members of my own family and those of my religious community. I ask the Lord Jesus to fill you with his most precious graces.

Merry Christmas 1996!



+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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