
« I SHALL SING THE MERCIES OF GOD »



Thérèse of Lisieux was only twenty-two when her sister Pauline who was prioress of the Carmelite monastery, asked her to write her childhood memories. It was already being felt around her that Thérèse was not to be long in this world. As soon as she was asked to write, Thérèse set to work, and in doing so she established a new literary style of writing by "writing about the mercies of God." At the close of a year like at the end of a lifetime, it is good to recall God's many kindnesses for us: His life in us, the family ties that unite us, and the wonders of our faith.

"MEMORIAL OF GOD'S GOODNESS"

Last June I published my eighth pastoral letter on the occasion of Pentecost. I took St. John Eudes's hymn, "Memorial of God's Goodness", to thank the Lord for everything we had experienced in our diocesan Church the twelve preceding months, especially, especially the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, the fifth Eucharistic Congress, family- and parish-based religious education, sacramental celebrations, pastoral sessions, etc. How could we thank God adequately for his goodness on our behalf, throughout the weeks and months? May Jesus himself be our own eucharist, our own thanksgiving!

FEAR OR HAPPINESS

Since September 11, 2001 the mass media have been focused on the tragic events of New York and Washington in such a way that we have become conditioned to such an extent by them that we risk becoming obsessed with terrorism. As a community we run the risk of losing sight of the joy and happiness surrounding us, of enjoying the innumerable moments of affection with which we are surrounded. May the celebrations of Christmas and New Year bring back these days of true joy, even if subdued because of the September events. May we once again marvel at God's many blessings, day after day. More than ever, it is good to repeat with the priest-poet Robert Lebel: *"Marvelling at so much love, how can we praise you, Lord? You visit us each day, the better to draw us to you. Who are we to you, after all, that you show your face as the heavens open? Yes, Lord, who are we, really, that your sun would extract for us the dew from the clouds? Who are we for you to kindly look down on our world? Truly, O God, who are we, that your wandering star should lead us to the Child?"* I believe that this beautiful song was the one that came to my mind the most often, in the course of the year.

EXCEPTIONAL VISITS

Looking back on the year which is drawing to a close, how could we forget the exceptional visits we have had? How could we forget the extraordinary pilgrimage of the World Youth Days Cross, last August? In its utter simplicity, the cross announced the forthcoming WYD events in our diocese, July 18 to 22, 2002, and July 23 to 28 in Toronto; further, this cross was a reminder of the central mystery of our faith, of God's love for each and everyone of us, even to giving us His only Son. It is this great mystery that our young people will be professing together, next summer. The second visit... does it need recalling? She has just been among us, the beloved Thérèse of Lisieux who wants from heaven to continue doing good on earth. May the precious graces we received at these visits continue to remind us of our call to holiness. We are all called to be the saints of the new millennium!

WONDERFUL FAMILIES

Let us take the opportunity during the holidays to think about the blessing which our families are. Family gatherings, even if they are sometimes quite a drain on parents, nevertheless allow us to experience great times together, and for these we are truly grateful. Through them we can grasp some of the richness of family life and of the love given, the solidarity felt, the kindnesses we experience, all of these help us overcome the difficult moments of life. It is also within the family that we most often experience the living God through love given and received, help extended and forgiveness granted; these experiences unveil to us the face of the living God. It is not for nothing that Pope John Paul II calls the family cell a "family church", since it is there that we find so much communion and joy.

BETHLEHEM AND NAZARETH

May the holiday period help us contemplate the mystery of the God-Child both at Bethlehem and Nazareth. Let us approach the Baby in the manger; with the shepherds, let us see Jesus all his simplicity and kindness. Let us listen to the heavenly message, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth." *During his pilgrimage to Nazareth, Pope Paul VI stated: "Nazareth is the school where we learn to understand the life of Jesus: it is the school of the Gospel. It is here that we learn to look at, listen to, meditate and internalise the deep and so mysterious but very meaning of his very simple, humble and beautiful manifestation of the Son of God. Here we discover the method to help us understand who Christ is. Here we discover the need to observe the context of his life among us: the places, times, customs, language, religious practices, everything that Jesus used to reveal himself to the world."*

THREE LESSONS

On that same occasion Pope Paul VI drew three main lessons from Nazareth: a lesson in silence, one in family living, and one in work. "O silence of Nazareth, teach us the art of recollection, of interiority, prepare us to listen to the good advice of true masters; teach us about the need and value of preparation, of study and meditation, of personal and interior life, of prayer which God alone sees. May Nazareth teach us about the family and its communion of love, its plainness and simple beauty. Let us learn from Nazareth how the formation received at home is good and irreplaceable; let us learn what is its primary role, on the social level. Nazareth, home of the carpenter's Son, it is here that we would like to understand and celebrate the strict and redeeming law of human labour; it is here that we would like to rekindle an awareness of the dignity of work; it is here that we would like to show others their great Model, their divine Brother, the Prophet of every just cause, Christ, our Lord." Have a beautiful end of the year 2001!

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (416) (26 December 2001)