
AT THE CRIB OF THE CHRIST-CHILD, I PRAY FOR YOU!



During these days celebrating the birth of our Saviour, I bear you and yours in my prayer and in my heart, and I pray the Christ-Child to bless you and grace you abundantly with hope, peace, happiness, and health.

WITH THE EYES OF THE HEART

A song of thanksgiving rises up in my soul enraptured by these great mysteries of love. Despite the abundance of Christmas hymns, there are two popular statements which affect me especially. The first is from the Little Prince who says: "One sees well only with the eyes of the heart... what is essential is invisible to our eyes..." and the other is from rock singer Gerry Boulet: "Today I look at life with the eyes of the heart." This echoes the prayer of the Church asking for the grace to better perceive the invisible: "A new light shines on the revelation of the Father's glory in the Word made flesh. We recognise in him the God who has made himself, and we are drawn by him to love what remains invisible." I can hear the prophet Isaiah's wonderful proclamation: "For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counsellor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, from David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this!" (Is. 9:5-6)

ALL THE CHILDREN

As I gaze on the new-born Child, how can I forget the children born in my family, and the 600 or so children who were born in our diocese in 2003, and all the children in the world? The words of singer Jacques Brel are music to Jesus and all the new-born: "A child triggers a dream in you, it gives voice to it and lets it fly as a song. A child, with a bit of luck, hears the silence and weeps diamonds. And it laughs to foolishness, weeps at seeing us cry, and it sleeps with gold lining the eyelids, to make us dream all the better." The words of Yves Duteil also come to mind: "Holding a child by the hand to lead it towards tomorrow, to give it confidence in its walk, taking a child for a king, holding a child in one's arms and, for the first time drying its tears by bursting with joy, holding a child in one's arms. Touching the heart of the child, to relieve its pain, softly without words, naturally, holding a child to one's heart. Holding a child in one's arms, but for the first time drowning in tears the joy that could be, holding a child closely and tenderly." Thinking of all the new-born, I pray that they become true friends of Jesus, that there be an active youth ministry to help them along their journey of faith, in the beautiful adventure as young Christians. "Taking a child by the hand, and singing it to sleep at the end of the day, taking a child, in love." "Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger", the angel had told the shepherds.

ALL THE PARENTS

"[The shepherds] went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger." (Lk. 2:16) Yes, as I stand by the Christ-Child I thank God for Mary and Joseph and I pray for all the parents and for all those whose wonderful mission it is to take care of their children... and by them and in them I see all those who are concerned for their children's welfare: grandparents, godparents, teachers, health care, recreation and sports professionals. And I ask the Lord to give us a family ministry that is more and more suited to our needs, and that in times of happiness and in difficult times, families find in the Church a place of truth, freedom, justice and peace, so that all of humankind be reborn to hope! "Like Mary and Joseph standing by the Child, make us attentive, Father, to the needs of all the families in our milieu so that, sharing in their joys and sorrows, we faithfully proclaim the Good News of salvation, and journey with them on the road to the Kingdom."

ALL THOSE IN CHARGE

The Birth Narrative tells us about all those who from close or far surrounded Jesus of Bethlehem, whether they were rulers of the country or the Temple, or humble shepherds in their fields, or wise men from the East... "In those days Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria..." (Lk. 2:1, 2) As I stand near the Christ-Child, I pray for all those who are concerned about the welfare of children and parents, and Church and country, for the establishment of a real peace, the one promised to men and women of goodwill. I pray and petition the Lord to make us all peacemakers. I pray for all the people of God, for its priests and pastoral agents, for its Gospel workers, that we all be bearers of hope and joy. "Give to all members of the Church the ability to read the signs of the times in the light of faith, and to work tirelessly in the service of the Gospel."

THEY PRAISED GOD...

As we come to the end of our Christmas celebrations, will we have the faith of the shepherds who in their simplicity were able to recognise the Child in the manger as the Saviour of humankind? "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, in accord with what had been told them". (Lk.2:20) Will we have the perseverance and the wisdom of the Wise Men who, after long and disturbing searching, finally reached Jesus and offered their extraordinary gifts? Do the Nativity celebrations help us be more human, and progress in the faith? Will they lead us to consider anew the children who are in problem situations, who live in poverty, who search for a more fraternal, more peaceful world? Will these celebrations help us better understand the parents of today, and support them in their daily lives? Will the celebrations give us a better understanding of our church and civil leaders, and incite us to pray for new leaders to carry on the struggle for greater love, compassion, kindness, and justice? Will we know how to offer the Child Jesus our beloved Church and its fervent desire to establish youth and family ministries, and find in its midst men and women of the Gospel, to carry out its mission? May the Emmanuel, God-with-Us, hear all these prayers. Merry Christmas!

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