

## Episode: “They Had Each Other”: A Meditation on Christmas

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My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins, and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Upon those who dwell in the land of gloom, a light has shown.” And this is what we celebrate today. After a long trip, a long journey throughout history, we finally encounter you. And the event that happened 2000 years ago is both historic, it’s a fact. And it is also an open book for me, Jesus. And today, thinking about the first nativity scene, the first figurines that were put in the history of humanity by you, I want to give you thanks, first of all, Jesus, God the Father, Holy Spirit, I want to give you thanks for coming. I really want to appreciate that. And also, I want to thank you for the secondary elements, secondary protagonists of this event. And maybe in my prayer today, entering into Bethlehem, entering into the stable, I want to look first of all at Joseph and Mary, and learn from them.

The Gospel says, “In those days, a decree was sent out from Caesar Augustus.” And he was commanding the whole empire to be enrolled. And Joseph, seeing Mary pregnant, almost at the very end of her pregnancy, had to go to Bethlehem, the town where his Jewish family had their ancestors, to be enrolled there, to go through the census. And it was a, it was a long trip, a long journey, three days from Nazareth. Nowadays, we get into a plane, into a car, we have air conditioner, heat, we put music, and it's very comfortable. Back then, the nicest couple in history, Mary and Joseph, both of them young, both of them with a few experiences from life, they end up entering into this dark, dangerous, unknown trip. And they were both united. And that's the first thing that I can learn from them. Joseph helping Mary, being pregnant, with delicacy, with refinement. I wish I had a video of that journey of both of them—just taking care of each other, talking, laughing, dreaming together. And when they got there, as the Gospel says, they didn't find a place. And Mary, smiling. Mary giving peace and whispering something to Joseph. And Joseph, with her, with his heart beating fast, not knowing what to do, finally understood that Our Lady needed some intimacy, some kind of place that was recollected. They didn't have money. With money, you can get anything you want, even if it's crowded, or whatever, money pays for everything, but they didn't have the money. They had each other. And they had, you know, this moment of inspiration to say, okay, let's find a recollected place for Jesus, for the baby. And they end up in, it's a stable, this place that was dirty, smelly, cold. And the Gospel says that when they were there, “the time came for her to have her child. And she gave birth to the firstborn son, Jesus Christ. And she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

I was contemplating recently an anonymous painting from the 15th century. Back then, there was a revival of the figure of St. Joseph, the devotion to St. Joseph took off in that century. And apparently this author painted

the Nativity in a very unique way because he puts St. Joseph in a corner, barefoot. And in the painting, you can see that he is kind of tearing his long stockings, like socks, he's breaking them. And I was very surprised when I saw it because, I thought what is he doing barefoot there everything's cold and he's destroying his socks? I was really, really shocked about the scene and the author, apparently, wanted to portray it, St. Joseph giving himself to the point that breaking his own or tearing his own clothes, and even the socks or stocking, in order to put together a blanket for Jesus, giving himself. And I thought that so poor, that so basic need, you cannot cover because you know, the hay probably was hurting the baby. The hay in the manger was itching. And then St. Joseph in this legend or this painting, is trying to give everything he has, even his own socks, to be barefoot in order to provide for, for you, my Lord. And that's a historical fact that Jesus was poor, Mary was poor, Joseph were poor. But they were happy, maybe precisely because of that. And there's something that I want to learn about this, Jesus, this combination between poverty and happiness, the unity that comes from poverty, it is so unique.

A few weeks ago, in the school where I work, at the end of the semester, they always put a market, so to speak, with the lost and found. The ladies that work there in the front office, grab all the things that have been accumulating over the semester, all sorts of things, right, in the closet. And they put out there in the market, all they might have, not in the market, but in front of the, of the office at the entrance, a table with all sorts of objects and clothing. And then I found a vest that looks pretty nice, actually. And then I tried and thought this is pretty good, pretty good quality, and and nobody was taking it. So then waited some days. And after three days, I went to Nancy and said, "Hey, Nancy, nobody's taking this thing. I'm gonna, I'm going to keep it for myself because it's really cool." And she, she told me, "yeah sure." And I said if someone calls reclaiming it, just let me know and I'll bring the bring it back immediately. And she said, "Don't worry, father, you're good. Good to go." And after a day, sure enough, in the morning I came into the building and Nancy called me, "Hey, father, guess what? There is a, there's a father that came to a basketball game a week ago and he forgot that vest and he's now saying if we found it. And I said sure. Here it is back to him." And then out of curiosity, I asked her, "what kind of, who was? Is he a dad from the school?" And she told me, "No, no he is a dad from another school. They came for a basketball game." Okay, okay. And I asked her, "do you know who he is?" And she told me, "Well, he said he's a lawyer. He said that he's a lawyer and he lives in Winnetka. And I was very pleased because Winnetka is a pretty nice neighborhood in Chicago, and also lawyers is a classy person, so I thought, oh, wow, look, I dressed like a lawyer for a while and I felt kind of proud of myself, a little bit, it's a classy guy, right? A lawyer from Winnetka.

Now, spiritually speaking, we need to dress up too. Christmas for you, for me, is an opportunity to think how am I dressed interiorly? Am I a classy guy spiritually speaking? Not out of vain, vanity. No, no. But what's my refinement? Jesus, what's my refinement? When I approach you for Christmas, I really feel your light coming to me, that simplifies me and that's the classiness, you know, the refinement of a, of a soul that gets closer to Jesus Christ. And then looking at Mary and Joseph helps us a lot, helps me a lot, at least, to say those souls that suffer in this world, whether they have pain, or poverty, or different situations in life that made them mature, spiritually speaking and humanly speaking, they're really beautiful souls. And I want to get into that mentality, that the mindset of poverty. Maybe, maybe I am rich. Maybe I have a lot of things. Maybe I don't have any pain or any limitation, financially speaking, but in the spiritual realm, in the spiritual world, I want to dress up, to be dressed up, in a way that is helping me to grow to towards you, my Lord. Putting to the side other things that that maybe give me some consolation or some reference, and just to focus on you, to look at you, and to look at Joseph and Mary, and in their simplicity, they're telling me, you don't need anything but each other. You don't need anything but just to look at the baby. And he will clean your eyes and your heart, he will make you simple in a good way. This is what all the saints have done throughout history, looking at Jesus.

Maybe these days, we can do it through the Eucharist, right? Going to a chapel or looking at Jesus in the nativity scene that you have set in your living room maybe. And in silence, allowing Jesus to enter, to have a stable, maybe, in your heart that you feel is dirty or inappropriate for him, or maybe, you know, smelly, or very, very

poor and cold. And that's part of the deal that you recognize that, that I recognize, that I don't have a place for you that you deserve. And nobody can do that. Not even the holiest person in history can provide, can match the love of God, that's the first thing. But that's not the end of the story. Like St. Joseph, we tear, we just provide with what we have, even if it's our socks and to me it's very basic, but it's so beautiful that a blanket made out of socks, and then maybe the t shirt, or whatever that you have. And then you experience a little bit of, you're cold because you'll have anything to cover you with anything or... But you give it to Jesus. And it's very poor. And maybe it's been dirty, but it's better than hay. And it is so basic, but at the same time, it's something that God really, really likes, when we give what we have.

This is what St. Josemaria says in one of his homilies in the book, *Christ is Passing*, and I quote, "you must look at the child in the manger. He is our love, look at him, realizing that the whole thing is a mystery." We need to accept this mystery on faith and use our faith to explore it deeply, very deeply. And the depth, in poverty, the deeper we get, the simpler we become the more in the sense that non complicated, more united, because we don't have anything else about ourselves. And that's the teaching of Christmas. Again, looking at Mary and Joseph, their unity, their joy it's contagious, it's infectious, and it's wonderful. And the fruit of that love, spiritually speaking, is the unity that we all experience in Christmas. And maybe today examine yourself, examine myself, Is there anything, my Lord, that is right now separating me from anybody in the world? Is there any hindrance, any wall, with any of my family members, friends, community, neighbors, even with people that I don't know? Do I have any enemy or any resentment? Is there anything that is an obstacle between me and someone else? And this is very important that we bring unity and we can do it at any level.

The Prelate of Opus Dei, in a letter that he sent to people in Opus Dei or friends, it's in the website of the Work, says that we can connect for Christmas our love, our refinement, to people that we know around us, to help people in Ukraine, in the Holy Land, and in other places in the world where there is a war. And it's very beautiful how he says that we cannot go there maybe to those areas of conflict, but if we live our fraternity, our love to each other where we are, we will be connected to that place in the world that is having a huge amount of violence or, or hatred. I like to think that this is exactly what happened years ago, when Our Lord asked to the apostles for fish, for food, fish and loaves of bread, and then there was someone that gave his lunch, right, and few pieces of bread, few fish, and Our Lord multiply that to feed 5000 people. So maybe if you and I forgive, I don't know, someone in our family, or someone in our neighborhood or a friend or coworker, or just to look at them with more love, maybe Our Lord takes that that feels like nothing, like a piece of bread, if that is not enough, but Our Lord multiplies that little act of love to feed 5000 people, spiritually speaking, that are thinking about divorce, 5000 families that because of your contribution, because of you forgiving someone, Our Lord takes that and says, "You know what? I'm going to save 5000 families. I'm gonna feed them with what you gave me." This is not just a fantasy, this is how it works. Through the Communion of Saints, the closer we are with Jesus, the closer we bring people with us. And this is what exactly happened in Calvary, when Jesus offered himself to the Father for us, for me. Or when Jesus from the very beginning of his existence, offered himself. Bethlehem means the city of bread. I didn't know that, I learned it recently the city of bread and it is so historic and symbolic that the place where Jesus was put was a place where animals will eat, a manger, which is very awesome, because it's super awesome, because it's connected to the Eucharist. It's Jesus as a food for animals. We are animals, I am an animal. Many times I have many sins, many dirtiness in my heart, whatever. But God is just putting himself there for me to be transformed, to heal. And it is so, this is so beautiful, my Lord, I should be so thankful, so grateful in Christmas. And maybe again, I want to examine myself and just with a very positive, optimistic, you know, experience of talking to you, then going into the world and bringing the light that I have received.

There is a song that describes something really wonderful that happened during First World War when the troops were stuck into the trenches for many months or even years, and it was a terrible war, as any war, right. And, and then it is this historical fact about Christmas, one of those years, happened to be in the middle of the battle in some place, I think around Belgium. And both troops just took a day off, so to speak, and had a break

during Christmas. And they were waiting in their trenches. In one side, British people. In the other side, German people. And some are allies, I guess. And in the middle of the night, they were singing songs, each side was Christian. And at some point, the song describes what happened. I'm going to read, song is "Christmas in the Trenches" by John McCutcheon. And it says that "there's someone coming towards us. The front-line century cried. All sides were fixed on one long figure trotting from the side, from their side, his truce flag, like a Christmas star, shown on that plane so bright, as he bravely strode unarmed into the light." So he was jumping, like getting out of the trench, to reach out to the other side, which is very risky, with one white flag, okay, but it's very risky. And then one by one, on either side, walked into no man's land. Imagine that you are there, and you just climb out of the trench. Again, you have your heart beating really fast, because you can be shot at any moment it's no, no guarantee that they will respect you, you're at war, literally. But then one by one, people just started getting out of their trenches, which is very, it's a historical fact. But it's also very symbolic for our family life, for our communities, getting out of my trench, getting out my room, maybe, of my little world. "With neither gun nor bayonet, we met their hand to hand, we share some secret brandy and wish each other well. We traded chocolates, cigarettes and photographs from home. These sons and fathers far away from their families of their own. Young Sanders played his Squeezebox, and they had the violin this curious and unlikely band of men. Soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more. With sad farewells we each began to settle back to war. But the question hunted every heart that lived that renders night. Whose family have I fixed within my sights? The frozen fields of France were warm as songs of peace were sung." But then war continued. And they were separated and and fighting against each other. But Christmas made possible for them to, to just stop and look at each other as human beings. And we should do that today, actually. I want to do this today, my Lord, just to look at people as human beings.

Bethlehem, the city of bread. Bethlehem, the place where Jesus was born. The Eucharist is Jesus coming to you, the person of Jesus Christ, taking possession of your heart, the Blessed Trinity dwelling in your soul, in my soul. And then after realizing about the love that I have received, looking at each other, at every single human being throughout history, with different eyes, with the eyes that are cleansed, that are purified by contemplating Jesus, by contemplating Mary, and also St. Joseph. What a great lesson we'll learn today. Everyday should be Christmas from now on. My Lord, you came here to stay, you didn't visit us. It's that you just swing by in the world for some years and say goodbye. You stayed here in the Eucharist, the same Jesus, hidden, more hidden than in Bethlehem, maybe. Because in Bethlehem, at least, you can argue he had a face, a smile, a cute little baby, right? And in the Eucharist, we don't even see that. But it's for our benefit. Because then Jesus can enter inside you and guide you, guide me, with his light, with his optimism, with his unity. It is impossible to pray and not to be united; it is impossible. So if I had a hard time being united to anybody, Jesus, today is the day to start over. Today is the day to put aside all my complications and to be a boy, to be a baby again, not a child in the sense of a spoiled one. But a simple heart, right? I don't know what's your, what's your favorite Christmas carol is. One of my favorite ones is definitely *Drummer Boy*. Because it's very similar to the scene that we just mentioned about St. Joseph giving his own socks to Jesus Christ as a blanket. The drummer boy gives what he has. And it very, from a point of view of human beings, it may feel stupid to do that, to annoy, you know, the Blessed Family with a drum. It's kind of annoying, the noise, right? But the drummer boy, the boy is not aware of that, he's just happy giving himself and maybe he's not even, you know, with a good sense of rhythm or whatever, he's not good at playing the drum. But Our Lady smiles and the baby too. And St. Joseph maybe smiles thinking, "man, can you get out of here?" But he smiles, at least. Because he's thinking that Jesus came to visit him, the drummer boy. And St. Joseph is pleased too because he enters into the mystery of God with refinement. Of course, Mary, the same thing, as a mother she's never annoyed about anything that a son does, especially for a brother. And in Jesus, we have a brother. In the Holy Family, we have a family. In Bethlehem, we have a home. And we are always welcome. It doesn't matter what talents you have or you don't have. It is the Son of God coming to see you, to be with you. And he's so defenseless that it's even overwhelming to think how he allows me to touch him, to hold him into my arms and to kiss him or to dress him or to sing lullabies to the Son of God. Right. But he's very happy in your hands.

Let's ask the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph to make every Mass, Christmas; to make every time of prayer, Christmas; to bring Christmas to the world today. To never stop to think or to realize, never stop thinking and realizing, that we are part of a family that has light, a light that can transform human history, that is transforming human history as we speak. Mary, Joseph, Jesus, I want to be always with the three of you. I don't want to leave Bethlehem. I don't want to get complicated. I don't want to grow up in a bad way. I want to just take advantage of my family, of my home in Bethlehem, to be more simple, to be more poor, in order to bring the simplicity of a heart made clean to the rest of the world.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help to put them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.