

Christmas Day

What does Christmas mean to you? It's a common question put to celebrities and the general public. So as we gather here on Christmas Day, I wonder, what does Christmas mean to you?

Stevie Wonder in the 1967 Christmas song entitled "What Christmas Means To Me" says

Oh, yeah. Candles burnin' low
Lots of mistletoe
Lots of snow and ice
Everywhere we go
Choirs singin' carols
Right outside my door
All these things and more (all these things and more)
Whoa, that's what Christmas means to me my love
(That's what Christmas means to me, my love) whoa, yeah. Yeah

The Diocese of Bristol put a YouTube video together a few years ago addressing the question...

'What does Christmas mean to you? They gave the following answers...

"seeing family, spending time together, enjoying being with people I love."

"Remembering loved ones who are no longer with us"

"eating nice things and having nice presents."

"Christmas... I actually find it (that is Christmas) a bit grim because a lot of people get disappointed, because they've got such high expectations and then it doesn't go quite how they would like it to be. I've noticed that in the run up it gets quite manic and afterwards people look quite sad, so frankly I'm glad when it's over."

"Now I've got grandchildren Christmas has come back – it was a bit meaningless before."

"Time away from work. Lots of rest."

"The lights are nice but it's overplayed. It's profiteering... but good for the kids!"

Some other folks said, "It's all about Christ." "It's good news." "It's about the gift of God to us."

"God with us in the mess and the majesty." "Christmas means that there is hope for the world."

SO What does Christmas mean to you???????

Christmas for most of us is not just a religious time, it is also a cultural thing and it is a family thing and whilst both those things can have their issues (shared culture and a focus on family isn't bad and celebration and feasting has its place as does giving and receiving), Christmas might be a little diminished without some of these things. However, it IS vastly **diminished without the story** being told... and the story would be diminished if it remains just a story.

Today I have posted on the Parish Facebook Group a quote from Pope Leo the Great. Our doggy was named after this Leo. Leo said,

**"Beyond our grasp, He chose to come within our grasp.
Existing before time began, He began to exist at a moment in time."**

Leo the Great

... The possibilities of forgiveness and new birth are now within our grasp.

For human beings to be at peace with God and with themselves. All that separates us from grasping God in our lives removed. To begin a new chapter of walking through life with the Lord in our lives.

To have our relationship with God restored... a union with him

God came to be where we are in order to take us to be where he is. Journey and Destination

God became what we are in order that we might become what he is. Transformation

What a possibility!

And there is possibility for that forgiveness and new life to run into our relationships with others. **Yet**, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace within ourselves and with other human beings is a really challenging thing. Indeed, it's one of the biggest and most challenging issues I meet in ministry.

A priest in Ukraine was recently interviewed. He is in Bucha where terrible things happened last year. He was asked whether he could ever forgive Russia for what happened. Amongst other things the priest said, "It's too early to talk about forgiveness..." The same might be said in Gaza or the little town of Bethlehem or perhaps in Yemen or in any situation where tragedy, pain and desolation IS being inflicted by others.

Yet the possibilities of forgiveness and new birth are at the heart of the Gospel... at the heart of Christmas... presenting themselves all unwrapped in the person of Jesus, ready to be taken into our hearts and lives and into the most desolate of situations. What seems beyond our grasp... forgiveness, new birth, hope and peace... in Jesus comes within our grasp!

On the charred walls of Coventry Cathedral behind the altar blitzed by the Nazis in WW2... the priest Richard Howard wrote the words "Father forgive." Just a few short weeks later he broadcast to the nation saying, "What we want to tell the world is this: that Christ born again in our hearts today, we are trying, hard as it may be, to banish all thoughts of revenge... we are going to try to make a kinder, simpler, a more Christ Child life sort of world in the days beyond this strife.

In the middle of the ruins of a city... where hundreds of innocent people died... he presented the Christ child... and the possibility of forgiveness and new birth. What seemed beyond one's grasp, he proclaimed was within one's grasp.

Thanks to the birth of Christ... God with skin on, God in the flesh..., forgiveness and New Birth is within our grasp too. The presence of God is now within our grasp... God with us... speaking to our hearts, making us new, giving us life. **THE WORD MADE FLESH.**

Transformation... peace and joy within our grasp, in this time.

This is the wondrous joy and unbelievable possibility of Christmas! What does Christmas mean? This is what it means to me and hopefully to all of us

**"Beyond our grasp, He chose to come within our grasp.
Existing before time began, He began to exist at a moment in time."**

Alleluia!