

## Homily for Christmas Night Mass 2020

In many ways these last days have been a bleak mid-winter for most of us; indeed, it's almost as if we have been living through winter since March.

Most recently, scenes of lorries and their drivers stuck on a motorway in Kent, not for one day but for three or four nights now, have brought home to us the bleakness of these past months. Most of us have not known a year like this past one; we would have to go back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war to seek a comparison to the disruption of life as we have known it. We can thank God that we are able to meet here and celebrate Christmas tonight. In some countries, churches and places of worship are closed. Christmas, we could say, has been cancelled. But we also know that we may well have to close down yet again in the coming days, as we do our best to avoid overwhelming the hospitals where we would seek care if we were to succumb to the virus.

Yet, the truth is that our sufferings are little, when compared to the sufferings of billions of people across the world. We know how other peoples' lives are torn apart by violence and war, by hunger and thirst, or by persecution. How can they celebrate Christmas in the Yemen, in the midst of bitter war and strife? How can the Christians of Palestine celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem, crippled as they are by an oppressive, vindictive neighbouring state? How do you celebrate in the midst of the drug wars in Central America? And the millions of people stranded in refugee camps in Pakistan, in Uganda, in Turkey, in the Sudan or in Kenya, what can they make of Christmas? The despair of their sufferings is unimaginable.

What is happening to us due to the Covid pandemic can, we could hope, have a positive influence on us if it helps us become more conscious of the reality of the lives of so many of our brothers and sisters across the world. In some ways, it helps us become more aware of just how privileged our existence has been over the past 50 or so years. Yes, our pain at this time is real: our pain of loss of loved ones, especially in the circumstances of Covid isolation, is real. Our feelings of powerlessness, when restrictions are imposed on us from on high, are not our imagination. They are a reality. Our frustration at our vulnerability is not

to be scoffed at, when schools are yet again closed, shops shuttered, holidays cancelled. We feel it and we feel we are suffering.

We can allow this suffering to work on our psyche and lead us into a slide of morosity and depression. Or, we can let this suffering lead us into a new life, as Jesus' suffering did on Calvary. Rather than let it get us down, it can lead us to reflect. Did not God come to the vulnerable, to those who had no voice, to those who were subject to the vicissitudes of life, living in insecurity, in fear, in pain?

God came in Jesus Christ to share our lot. God was born in a stable, in the confusion of a census which put the people in panic. God in Jesus lived in a time of uncertainty, in a land occupied by the enemy, in poverty. God associated with the poorest of society, chose the uneducated and humble as friends. God lived, not in a big house needing to exploit others and nature to maintain his standard of living, but in harmony with nature, respectful of persons and beasts and the environment in which he lived.

In Jesus, God would teach, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit... Blessed are the humble... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are those who thirst for justice for others..."

Blessed, then, are we in our fragility, in our vulnerability. Blessed are we in our grief and in our mourning. Blessed are we in our insecurity and anxiety about what tomorrow might bring. Blessed are we in our weariness in the middle of this bleak winter.

The author, Kathleen Norris, wrote: "It is precisely because we are weary, and poor in spirit, that God can touch us with hope. This is not an easy truth... But as the martyred archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Romero, once said, it is only the poor and hungry, those who know they need someone to come on their behalf, who can celebrate Christmas."

**"God can touch us with hope".**

In the midst of the bleak winter, when troubles are falling on us like snow upon snow, almost driving us to despair, we can do nothing better than to turn to God; to this God who left heaven and came among us in his Son Jesus; to this God who took upon himself all our vulnerability, our pain, our anxiety as he died on the cross and rose in the glory of the resurrection. We can do nothing better than to come before the divine child lying in the manger and give our heart God.

If you have time, take moment to listen to the Carol sung by Annie Lennox on the Andrew Marr Show:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-7bHxQU8uc>