

## **Homily for the Nativity of the Lord**

This season of Christmas brings to mind many wonderful traditions. And one of them that children and all those young-at-heart look forward to is the giving of gifts. It's interesting how those words "give" and "gift" are related. Actually, the very root meaning of the word 'gift' is "that which is given". And when one receives "that which is given", in turn, he or she gives the gift of gratitude back to the giver. And so, both the giver gives gifts and gets gifts, while the getter gets gifts and gives gifts. Get it? Got it? Good! In other words, to give a gift is to bring to full circle the gift of love, which inspires the giving in the first place. That's why we feel closer to those who give us gifts – it is the love behind the gifts that moves us to love them more, and so grow in our relationship with them.

Well, as we celebrate this most beautiful of traditions – the Christmas Mass – we bring to mind this same dynamic of giving and getting gifts. In our celebration of Christmas, we ponder the most amazing gift God the Father has ever given us in the person of His Son, Jesus, who was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. God gives us His Gift through the arms of our Blessed Mother. And He invites us in turn to receive Him, and then give Him a gift – not only our gratitude for Jesus, but even more the gift of our very lives in return. It's because of Jesus, who died for our sins, that we can have eternal life with God in heaven. And so, because of the life Jesus has given to us – His own – He invites us to give Him our lives.

*He desires our hearts, and our minds, our words, and our actions. Things private and public and – yes, everything matters. He desires our weekends, our work, our feelings and wills. Yes, the Giver desires even our ills and our thrills.*

And because God has given us the greatest gift of His Son, He desires to bring to full circle the gift of love, which inspired Him to give us our Savior in the first place. And the more completely we give ourselves to God, is the more fully we not only love God, but the more completely that we receive His love. And thus our relationship with Him grows more and more!

To close, I'd like to offer a poem I came across the other day called *The Night Before Christmas*. No, not the one we all know with sugar plums and St. Nicholas, but another one by a certain Sister St. Thomas.

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the town,  
St. Joseph was searching, walking up roads and down;  
Our Lady was waiting, so meek and so mild,  
While Joseph was seeking a place for the Child;  
The children were nestled, each snug in their beds,  
The grown-ups wouldn't bother – "there's no room", they said;  
When even the innkeeper sent them away,  
Joseph was wondering, just where they would stay;

He thought of the caves in the side of the hills,  
“Let’s go there”, said Mary, “it’s silent and still”;  
The moon on the breast of the new fallen snow,  
Made pathways of light for their tired feet to go;  
And there in a cave, in a cradle of hay,  
Our Savior was born on that first Christmas Day!  
The Father was watching in heaven above,  
He sent for His angels, His couriers of love;  
More rapid than eagles God’s bright angels came;  
Rejoicing and eager as each heard his name;  
Come Power, Come Cherubs, Come Virtues, Come Raphael,  
Come Thrones and Dominions, come Michael and Gabriel;  
Now fly to the Earth, where My poor people live,  
Announce the glad tiding My Son comes to give;  
The Shepherds were watching their flocks on this night,  
And saw in the heavens and unearthly light;  
The Angels assured them, they’d nothing to fear,  
“It’s Christmas”, they said, “the Savior is here”!  
They hastened to find Him, and stood at the door,  
Till Mary invited them in to adore;

He was swaddled in bands from His head to His feet,  
Never did the Shepherds see a baby ever so sweet!  
He spoke not a word, but the shepherds all knew,  
He was telling them secrets and blessing them too;  
Then softly they left Him, The Babe in the hay,  
And rejoiced with great joy on that first Christmas Day;  
And Mary heard them exclaim as they walked up the hill,  
“Glory to God in the Highest, Peace to men of good will!”

God bless you, and Merry Christmas.