



Dear Friends,

In this storied time of the year we hear of three Wise Men who spotted in the dark night sky a light promising a future. They set out to find how that future could come about. They found new life; they found hope.

Living within the darkness of Covid, we search for a light, yearning for...what?

Some, and I among them, yearn to go back to the life we lost close to a year ago. We want to be together again, to toss away masks, “social distancing” and hand sanitizers. We want restaurants and sports and bars and shopping like it was before. We want things the way they were.

But, as the author Thomas Wolfe wrote, “You can’t go home again.” “Going back” is not the future, it’s the past. How can we go back when so much has changed? Lots of restaurants and bars are gone. Many won’t come back. Over 300,000 of our people have died. How can we just forget them? “Black Lives Matter” brought thousands to city streets across the nation, “white power” groups fought in the streets of Milwaukee and the presidential election exposed a deeply divided nation. How can we all forget that?

People over the entire globe have suffered and died just like our people and from the exact same disease. Can we learn that the human race is in this together? Ditto for climate change. Many of our fellow citizens wouldn’t believe that Covid-19 was even real. How can we plan a future when even our leaders don’t believe our professionals?

Going back is no more an option for us than it was for the Wise Men after they found the child. They went home knowing everything had changed. And that’s the key for us today; we, too, have to find that child and realize things are not the same.

Each Christmas God reminds us one thing does remain the same. He’s now one of us. Nativity tells the story of how our God loves us so much he became a human just like us and in the same way from start to finish. As our Eastern Christian brothers and sisters say, “God became human so we could become divine.” Given what I’ve said above, we don’t seem very divine, but that doesn’t change what Nativity is telling us. God is among us, is one of us, and we humans have the capacity to change the world.

What was the greatest threat to Jesus? Being publicly executed as a revolutionary. He was, and is, a revolutionary. But did his death end anything? NO! HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD! That same power is now within us. We can’t change anyone but ourselves, but if I allow Christ to change me, I will have power beyond anything I can do on my own. As St. Paul put it, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me...I live by *faith in the Son of God*, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:19b - 20) And that faith can move mountains.

Sure, the horror of evil exists, scaring our world in so many ways. That's nothing new; evil has been part of human life since Adam and Eve. Nativity says loud and clear that God lives with us in this evil infected world but nothing is impossible with God.

The word *religion* means "to retie," to rebind things together, to connect things. The Nativity calls us to remember that God is bound to us humans and binds us with each other all through one person - Jesus of Nazareth, the babe in the crèche. We need to be reminded of that each year because therein lies our hope for the future.

Can we see the Lord among us working through those "connecting" with others through food drives and toy drives? And when we celebrate those isolated by Covid as they emerge from the loneliness of the hospital to the warm embrace of family and friends, can we see the Lord curing the sick? Are we able to see Christ working through the efforts of those who are trying to bind us together again as a nation?

The Creed tells us the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, is "the Lord, *the Giver of Life*"! If we believe what we profess, how can we despair? We may live in a Good Friday world, but Easter is bigger and will always overcome.

Look at that child in the crèche. See the one who still walks with us. See, as we all do with any newborn, hope for the future and the joy that brings. God has not abandoned us. He is still here and he will change things through us, if we, like Mary, agree to work with him.

"Hope springs eternal" is not just a nice thought; it's real. I pray that Christ will give you hope this Christmas and the joy hope brings so we can face 2021 boldly and with faith in the God who walks among us.

Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year to all.

*Fr. Denis*