

Dec. 9, 2018

Dear Parishioners,

Last year when I walked the Way of St. Francis from Assisi to Rome, the path went through the region where St. Francis made the first "Precepio" (Creche) or nativity scene. Francis was so enthralled and in love with the fact of God becoming a human baby in such poverty, a manger, that he wanted others to understand the immense magnitude of this mystery, the mystery of the Incarnation. Francis made the first live nativity scene and invited everyone around to come and see. He started the tradition of the nativity scene that has very much become a part of Christmas.

In the spirit of St. Francis, to make the reality of the Incarnation a more prominent symbol, especially for children, we have a new nativity scene this Christmas that is much larger than the one in the past. The proportions of this new nativity scene will much better reflect the size of our church. This new nativity scene was made possible by a generous gift to the parish in memory of a deceased person. This nativity scene has the possibility of growing in the future to include shepherds, the three kings and other figures. Perhaps organizations in the parish or individuals would like to sponsor obtaining more figures. A figure could be ordered in memorial of a deceased person, where a small plaque could be placed on the figure with the person's name. A stable is being made for this new nativity scene by a parishioner and the nativity scene that was formerly in the church will be on display in the pastoral center.

Recalling this event with St. Francis in Greccio, Pope Benedict some years ago gave a beautiful reflection on the nativity scene which I would like to share here: "It is necessary to seek to live in the reality of daily life what the crib represents, namely, the love of Christ, his humility, his poverty. This is what St. Francis did at a place called Greccio: he recreated a live presentation of the nativity scene in order to contemplate and worship it, but above all to be better able to put into practice the message of the Son of God who for love of us emptied himself completely and made himself a tiny child.

The figures in the nativity scene remind us that the crib is a school of life where we can learn the secret of true joy. This does not consist in having many things but in feeling loved by the Lord, in giving oneself as a gift for others and in loving one another. Let us look at the crib. Our Lady and St. Joseph do not seem to be a very fortunate family; their child was born in the midst of great hardship; yet they are full of deep joy, because they love each other, they help each other and, especially, they are certain that God, who made himself present in the little Jesus, is at work in their story. And the shepherds? What did they have to rejoice about? That Newborn Infant was not to change their condition of poverty and marginalization. But faith helped them recognize the "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" as a "sign" of the fulfillment of God's promises for all human beings, "with whom he is pleased" (Lk 2: 12, 14).

This is what true joy consists in: it is feeling that our personal and community existence has been visited and filled by a great mystery, the mystery of God's love. In order to rejoice we do not need things alone, but love and truth: we need a close God who warms our hearts and responds to our deepest expectations. This God is manifested in Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary. Therefore the figures which we place in a stable are at the center of all things, the heart of the world. Let us pray that every person, like

the Virgin Mary, may accept as the center of his or her life the God who made himself a Child, the source of true joy.”