

NATIVITY 2023

The secret of Christian Christmas

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1. This year, it seems for understandable reasons that the public Christmas rites in Bethlehem are cancelled. There's sadness and hope in our prayers and solidarity for Gaza and Palestine, and for wherever violence humbles the voices of people calling for peace. Precisely for this reason, with their eyes full of suffering and trust they gaze at the Child of Bethlehem in whom the dignity of every child shines. If at Christmas, streets

and houses are festively decorated with lots of lights, it is not just due to consumerism, but because of a cultural revolution thanks to which the child from being an object has become a subject, and this began precisely with the Christmas of Christ, which is the story of a God who becomes a child, and since then no child can be property or an object. Whoever is born is the beginning of a new world, a world that never existed in the world, and around the newborn child a great family is reborn. Sadly, the news continues to recount daily stories of abortions, of children slaughtered in war scenes, exploited by adults for prostitution, labour, organ trafficking, paedophilia, or subjected to physical and psychological violence. It is indeed true that, as the Italian writer Alessandro D'Avenia writes, 'at the heart of the world's evil is the relationship we have with being born and with giving birth, everything else is a consequence, because if you are capable of harming a defenceless person, you can do so to anyone and anything (even Nazism began with Aktion T4, the programme for eliminating children deemed sick or unfit)'. In truth, the newborn Jesus experienced the risk of being killed at the behest of politicians, in the same way Charlie Gard, Alfie Evans, Isaiah Haastrup and recently little Indi Gregory did in England, as King Herod ordered the elimination of all children in Bethlehem for fear of the new king spoken of in the holy scriptures.

2. In front of the defenceless infant of Bethlehem, it becomes paradoxical to see that war and violence affect children most of all, that millions of abortions are carried out, which, in a bitter sweet false truth, are even protected as rights. And so killing is sometimes a crime to be punished and at other times a right to be protected: does this seem right to you? Why are we surprised if, beyond official proclamations, life is not always wanted, loved and respected? When man sets himself up as the 'master' of life, every type of violence becomes possible. The Christmas miracle we can ask for is that we return to accepting life as a gift to be cherished with religious respect, and only then can we speak of justice and peace. It is the children who ask us, because we do not take care of them because we love them, but we learn to love them when we begin to take care of them. Alessandro D'Avenia notes that 'The child pulls us out of our mania for control, power, accumulation, ultimately our fear of death. The child is beginning, unseen freedom, history never seen and never to be seen again.'

3. Christmas helps us rediscover the divine root of the human adventure of life. We are brothers and sisters not by our own choice but because we are born by the will of a God who is father of all. From this divine love originates the human fraternity that encourages us to respect and love our life and to be reborn every day by taking care of others. First and foremost, those who live around us: relatives with whom we hope to spend the Christmas holidays in serenity, distant friends with whom we will be in touch

for greetings, but also couples who cannot have children, families who have lost a child, hearths broken by separations and divorces, people shattered by grief and indifference, lonely and abandoned people. And also men and women from all over the world whom we may never meet. All this began at the Christmas of Christ, and we must return to Him if humanity is to know days of true spiritual material well-being.

4. Let us celebrate Christmas as our Christmas by contemplating the depths of our soul. Let us dialogue with the Pascolian 'child' that dwells within us, the child that we are regardless of our age or that we have never been for various reasons, the child that never stops growing and let us ask him what he brings us anew, how we can mature over the years without ceasing to preserve the wonder of the child who smiles at life even in the most problematic situations. And as we allow ourselves to be embraced by the child who dwells in us, the Child of Bethlehem who rests in the grotto of Bethlehem in the arms of Mary smiles at us, and in Him we feel the joy of being loved. Perhaps herein lies the secret of Christian Christmas, that it may be a message of love and forgiveness of a God who, in order to be accepted, made Himself so small as to dwell in the womb of a Woman like each one of us.

*** *Bishop emeritus of Ascoli Piceno***