

Pastoral Letter - December 13, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Christmas comes each year to draw people in from the cold.

Like tiny frightened sparrows, shivering from the winter cold, many live their lives on the barren branches of heartbreak, disappointment, and loneliness, lost in thoughts of shame, self-pity, guilt or failure. One blustery day follows another, and the only company they keep is with fellow strugglers who land on the same branches, confused and unprotected.

We try so hard to attract them into the warmth. Week after week church bells ring. Choirs sing. Preachers preach. Lighted churches send out their beacon. But nothing seems to bring in those who need warmth the most.

Then, as the year draws to a close, Christmas offers its wonderful message. Immanuel. God with us. He who resided in heaven, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, willingly descended into our world. He breathed our air, felt our pain, knew our sorrows, and died for our sins. He didn't come to frighten us, but to show us the way to warmth and safety.

In spite of this, however, some—in fact, most—still keep their distance. It happened when He first came; it happens to this day.

Nevertheless, Christmas comes again. And again. And again. The story of Bethlehem's Babe is told another time. We sing the same carols, return to the same manger, and watch the same bewildered couple, Mary and Joseph, as they caress their firstborn, and we stand in awe for the umpteenth time ... and it never grows old!

Why? Because we all know what it feels like to shiver on the frozen branches of our world, rejected, wounded, and scared ... because each one of us can remember when we finally flew into the

warmth of His love ... and because we keep hoping that maybe, just maybe, this Christmas will be the one for some sparrows we love to come in from the cold.

For many, Christmas is the loneliest or most depressing time of the year: families of those in prison—and the prisoners themselves; single parents; the aged; the hospitalized; the dying and those who ministered to them; men and women in the military; adults still haunted by frightening memories of their childhood; recently widowed men and women; and students who can't go home for Christmas.

For most, Christmas can become little more than a selfish, greedy, unsatisfying experience. When gift-buying gets out of control, the season turns into a financial, frustrating frenzy. Instead of slowing our pace, enjoying the lights, drinking in the music, and sitting quietly with those we love, we fall in with the hectic hurry to find this, mail this, allowing it to eclipse the meaning.

For a few, Christmas is the only time they ever hear or think seriously about the Lord Jesus Christ. The carols include some of the finest theology in all of hymnody. The message of the Incarnation is portrayed clearly in dramatic pageants, readings, and special services. Christmas cards are opened and read by those who would never otherwise entertain the Gospel story.

So, this Christmas season I pray the warmth of the Savior's love will spread itself over you as never before. And that whenever and however possible, you will keep reminding yourself that there are still tiny, shivering sparrows who are too terrified to come in from the cold. Maybe, just maybe, this Christmas, because of something you do or say ... they will.

A Blessed and Joyous Christmas Season,

Pastor Lucero