

Bishop Malesic 2016 Christmas Message

May we always be grateful to God for sending His Son to us

Dear Friends in Christ:

We recently completed the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy during which we focused on Jesus as the face of the Father's mercy. Now we find ourselves continuing to reflect on God's love in our lives and His desire to save us as we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the birth of Jesus.

One of the most recognized of all Gospel passages is the 16th verse from the third chapter of the Gospel of John: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). This is the ultimate Christmas gift — God's gift of his only Son. This is what we celebrate on Dec. 25.

Even as an infant, Jesus shows us the face of God's love to us. He will draw the poor and the rich to adore Him, both shepherds and kings. And He will draw us to contemplate the face of God in his innocence. What a gift to us: God coming to us in the flesh, to be born among us, walk with us, teach us, and then die out of love for us only to rise from the dead so that He will remain with us forever.

Just as God has been so generous to us (He gave us His only son), so, too, are we inspired to be generous with each other at this time of year. Out of love for the Infant Jesus, we strive to be good to one another, just as God has been good to us in Christ. So, we pack bags of food to provide meals for people and share our material blessings with those in need. We help disadvantaged children in our communities receive Christmas gifts through projects such as parish Angel Trees and Giving Trees. We cook and serve special Christmas dinners so people who are alone have both a hot meal and warm companionship on this special, blessed day. We make sure that we visit our elderly relatives and try to cheer them up if they are depressed. We draw each other together as families, and we come closer to one another as the Family of God as we gather for the celebration of our Christmas Masses.

In these actions, and in so many more, we see the face of God in others. As we move beyond the Year of Mercy and beyond this Christmas season, I fervently pray and hope that we all continue to clearly see that face, especially in those who are suffering: the single mother who is alone and pregnant; the abandoned child; the drug addict; the homeless; the unemployed; the hungry; the immigrant stranger; the sick and the aged. There are so many people in our communities, even in our own neighborhoods and families, who need us to be witnesses of Christ's love for them.

A man known as Rockin' Rollen (his real name was Rollen Stewart) was a fixture at what seemed like every nationally televised sporting event in the 1980s. He was instantly recognized

by his large rainbow wig and a sign he held high that simply read “John 3:16.” It was much easier to write that on a sign than to write out the full verse from sacred Scripture.

After Stewart’s life fell apart in the early 1990s, “John 3:16” seemed to go into a sort of public hibernation. Then the mantle was taken up in 2009 by a Heisman Award-winning quarterback from Florida, Tim Tebow. He had “John 3:16” written in the eyeblack he wore for every game, and he would “take a knee” in thanks to God when he scored a touchdown.

Both Stewart and Tebow were controversial for what many thought were overzealous public displays of their faith. Tebow is still a controversial figure, and many people believe that is solely because of his Christian witness.

We don’t have to be on national television to give witness to our Catholic Christian faith, although it would be great if we all could. Private Christian witness is as powerful as public witness when a quiet, almost unseen, gesture of love touches the life of someone else. God’s gift to us “because he so loved the world” is meaningless if we don’t take His gift of love and share it with others. Words without action don’t mean much. When “the Word became flesh,” God put His Word into action: he gave us His Only Begotten Son. God has shown us the way to put our words into action. If we say we love one another as God has loved us — by giving us the gift of Jesus — then we must show it — by giving the gift of Jesus to the world.

Merry Christmas, everyone. Celebrate and enjoy this blessed day, the day of our Lord’s birth and the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Messiah for his people. Celebrate and enjoy the entire Christmas season — it goes until Jan. 8 when we celebrate the Epiphany. Celebrate the joy the entire year. May we always be grateful to God for sending His Son to us. How blessed we are to have Jesus for our Lord!

I will keep you in my prayers, as I always do. Please keep me in yours. I certainly do need and appreciate them. Thank you for your faithful witness as disciples of Jesus.

Yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic, JCL
Bishop of Greensburg