

## **HOMILY – CHRISTMAS EVE – FAMILY MASS**

Something has always puzzled me about Christmas. Why is it that so many of us want a haircut before Christmas? I would like to think it is because we are celebrating the birth of a very important person, so we want to look our best. Or maybe we are hoping when the family come together, our mum or your wife or your friend will say, 'Your hair is looking good'. We all hope to get to the barbers before Christmas, as if to say if I don't get there till 10 January then it will be a disaster!

Life is a series of hopes and dreams. When you are 3 years old you hope Santa will come. When you are 7 years old, you hope soon to be 8!! When you are 17 years old, you hope to pass your driving test, when you are 25 years old, you hope to have your own place to stay and when you are 35 years old, you hope you still look 25!! Life is a series of hopes, growing up, finding a job, falling in love, even our team winning the Champions League. Now there's an excuse for a haircut!!

Pope Benedict, in 2007, was 'dog tired' in the summer, the hot month of June in the city of Rome. He was hoping for his holiday, up in the hills of Frascati. There he wrote one of his most beautiful and powerful letters, called "Spe Salvi", which means "In hope, we were saved", an explanation of Christian hope. He wrote, "The truth is, before Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem, much of the world was without hope and without God in the world. The Gospel makes things, it is life changing! The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope, lives differently". Now we know the path.

A man phoned this morning, his wife is very ill in hospital, but she has great faith in God. He said to me before going to see her, "I don't know how people cope with trials who have no faith in God". You see, this distinguishing mark of Christians is the fact that they have a future, it is not that they know the details of what awaits them but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. The person of Jesus is real. The Gospel is real. The hope of God is real. Because the baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God is now very real to us. It changed the world forever.

Think about the 'Magi', the so called 'Three Wise Men', looking and guided by the star, their hopes were fulfilled when they found the Christ-child. As saviour, he is the King of the Universe, showing us that it is love and not knowing the stars, that will be our salvation.

Because God is love and all those on the side of love listen to his voice then that faith and love, put into action, causes us to want to have our own babies baptized (hair or no hair). The priest asks the parents, 'What do you ask of God's Church?' and they answer, 'faith'. He then asks 'And what does faith give you' and the parents answer 'Eternal life'. So, our love and our hope, is that our baby boy or girl will be granted eternal life by God. We desire that happiness for our child that only God can bring. This is no false hope, as Jesus says in John's Gospel, "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you". Faith and hope go together, not just at Christmas but every day, to shape our lives.

One hundred years ago, Marxism imposed at the 1917 Russian Revolution, by Lenin and Stalin, tried to eliminate Christian Faith and focus hope on industrial, scientific and economic success. It was doomed to failure. If you take Christian faith out of any society then you also take away the real hope of a fulfilling life that overcomes evil. Now, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Christianity is flourishing in Russia. We must never forget, as Pope Benedict wrote "It is not science that redeems mankind; humanity is redeemed by love". Not just love but unconditional love. We find that love in the birth of a

baby in Bethlehem. "God loves the world so much that He sent his only Son, to be our Saviour". Now is the time when we remember that moment, that gives eternal hope to the world. So much so, that we want to go and get our hair cut beforehand. Now Our Lady is the Star. The Stella Maris, the Star of the Sea. The Star of Hope, guiding us through the storms of life, to come and adore the new born King. Jesus Christ, Emmanuel. A name that means God is with us.

To finish, as Christians, we should never limit ourselves to asking 'how can I save myself?' We should ask, what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too, the star of hope may rise? My hope, this Christmas, is for you and I to inherit salvation, by the Grace of God.

God Bless you All.

Amen