SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

In a cave, grim and cold, which even in the bright sun would look dark and miserable, where the light of St. Joseph's lamp would do little more than to expose the jagged walls and show every ragged rock and crag, where the floor was covered in straw trampled by animals so that it was mixed with their filth and rotting away and where was left a wooden box left to feed those same animals, there was born God made Man.[1]

Above that cave shone out the bright, cheerful lights of the inn and the sounds of laughter echoed down to to the silence of the cave. Up above was the world and all its empty claims of happiness and self-entitlement. But down below was heaven now on earth with the fulfillment of the promise of God that He would come to save us.

For many, they would still choose that comfortable inn above and grasp for those things which look very appealing in the dark but which with the light of day shows the ugliness and emptiness of it all. For a few others, they would look instead to that wretched cave and see that in that darkness was born the true light, the light which enlightens everyone, which had come into the world (cf. *Jn*. 1:9). As St. John would write in his gospel, "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was His own, and His own people did not accept Him" (*Jn*. 1:10-11).

For those who are of the world, the inn offers the only way to happiness and satisfaction. With all it's claims that we should not have to suffer, we should not have to be denied anything that we want, that only by having more will we be more, that there is no such thing as sin anymore—and even for those who still cling to such an out-of-date notion, you really don't have to take it all that seriously—that love is love and truth is whatever you decide it to be for

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[1] Leen, Edward. *In the Likeness of Christ* (1936); Morrison, Robert. "Rediscovering the Cave of Bethlehem and the Paradox of Christianity", The Remnant Newspaper (remnantnewspaper.com), 20 December, 2023.

yourself. To the world and all those who cling to it, the idea of sacrifice is abhorrent and even criminal, that the greatest love is the love I have for myself, and that God did not become Man, but man has become God.

But look away from the inn and down to the chasm to that cave. See in it that faint light which pierces through the narrow door. A light not made by man, but rather a light that is God made Man. A light that is like the sun that shall no more go down, or the moon which will no longer wane, for, as the prophet Isaiah said, "the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended" (see *Is*. 60:20).

That inn and that cave are for us, still, today, a moment of decision. Which will we choose? The satisfaction of the inn or the sacrifice of the cave? In one we will find all that we want now but which will eventually fade away. In the other we will find hardship and yearning but which will give way to a joy that will never fade away (cf. I *Pt*. 5:4).

This is the great paradox of our faith, the seeming contradiction of Catholicism; that the promise of a home with unending happiness is found only at the end of a long road of suffering. And it this that the Holy Family of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph show to us at Christmas. For the Blessed Virgin who was promised so much, that she was to be the Mother of God Himself, would have to leave her home to travel hundreds of miles to give birth to her child in a far away place, and that, in the end, she would see that same child die in agony on the Cross, yet could still exclaim, "from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (*Lk*. 1:49). For St. Joseph, entrusted by God to be the protector and provider of this family, he suffered every setback and disappointment with perfect resignation and accepted whatever it was that God would will.

In this Holy Family, in this remembrance of the nativity of Our Lord, we are shown that God created us to know, love, and serve Him in this world and live

with Him in joy in the next. But we are shown, too, that we must use our free will to turn to God if we wish to serve Him: "God, Who created us without our will, would not save us without our will. He could pay the ransom for our sins a million times over; we should still remain slaves of Satan did we not use our free will to turn to God."[2] And that whatever God may order in our lives—whatever disappointments, whatever setbacks, whatever we may lose in our lives—these things are given to us so that, just as did St. Joseph, we will turn to God.

As we celebrate Christmas and we receive gifts and give gifts to one another, let us not forgot the one from whom we have received the greatest of gifts, and the one to whom we should give a gift. Let us offer to Jesus, Our Lord, our soul and heart made holy and pure, for this is the best we can offer to Him, and the only thing that will truly bring us peace and joy.

I began by speaking of those who long for the world and of whom St. John said, "He came to what was His own, and His own people did not accept Him" (*Jn*. 1:11). But St. John finishes by saying, "But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (*Jn*. 1:12-13). Today, give thanks to almighty God that because of that child of God, whose birth we celebrate today, has given to us the gift to become children of God, if only we will come down from that inn and go into that cave and see in that darkness the true light of the world.

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[2] Leen, Edward. *In the Likeness of Christ* (1936); Morrison, Robert. "Rediscovering the Cave of Bethlehem and the Paradox of Christianity", The Remnant Newspaper (remnantnewspaper.com), 20 December, 2023.