

HOMILY FOR CHRISTMAS DAY (DAWN)

This day is like no other. I'm sure you felt it when you got up this morning.

Perhaps your house has been ready for this day for some time with lights and decorations. The tree may be sitting in the corner with presents underneath or, perhaps, you have already raided them this morning. Is there an angel on the tree or have they already gone into heaven? There is a certain kind of anticipation for the day ahead because things will be different today. Today we remember the birth of Jesus Christ.

God gives the good stuff and Jesus is the greatest gift of all. It does sound like a clichéd Christmas card but, it's the reality of what this day means.

The readings we've heard confirm it. The first reading presented a proclamation to the Children of Israel of a gift like no other – their saviour was coming. It was what they were hoping for and, it was what God intended to give them from the very beginning.

Their lives had been derelict and burdened. They had been in exile and saw no way out of it. They were holding on for a hero. They didn't quite get what they were expecting but, what they got was better. The gift God sent was for the entire world.

And, interestingly, the gift included making those who receive this gift, a gift in themselves, even becoming called "The Sought After." People would want what we have.

In actual fact, God has never thought of us as being less than a gift ourselves. In the second reading, Titus reminded us that God didn't act for us in Jesus because of any good we could do for ourselves. Jesus came because of what we couldn't do for ourselves. Such was God's compassion for we who are God's gift in the world, even saving us for eternal relationship.

This has been confirmed by our Baptism. Titus spoke the cleansing water of rebirth and our being renewed with the Holy Spirit, 'generously' poured over us through Jesus Christ our Saviour. By the fact this 'pouring' is generous, means that it is the gift being presented to us in the form of Baptism, which was presented to the world originally in the baby Jesus. He became the child of God and, through Baptism, we become the children of God. Like Jesus, we are gifted for loving service to others, especially to those in need and without hope, as was Jesus.

This is why the gift from God makes us a gift as well.

The angel had told the shepherds of a gift when they were told about a joy to be shared by the whole people. The sign of this was the baby lying in a manger and, the sign was also, the gift.

We sometimes forget that this is a gift we are still unwrapping. Sometimes there are some tough pieces to break through to get to it.

Mary was yet to learn so much more about this child she had borne. She would know difficulty in coming to see what a gift he was as she witnessed his Passion and death. Nevertheless, she treasured every part of the journey that she took with Jesus.

She treasured it because she knew that Jesus is a gift to the world and it is too easy to let it be cliched. Jesus makes a difference to this day but a gift like this is not just for a day.

None of us knows all there is to know about Jesus. He is a gift who shares every aspect of our human journey in the best way possible but, does not avoid the worst way either. If we think we have had it hard, then he has had it with us. We might not have noticed that because we may not have been expecting that or, we may just have forgotten he's there.

If we can remember that he is with us then, just as this is a day like no other, we might rediscover a life like none we have had before.

This is what God intended the gift for.