

OVAL MASS

December 24 2011

EVENING MASS

MASS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Picture a man going through the desert. The heat of the sun beats down mercilessly upon him. The glare from the burning sand almost blinds him. He is ready to collapse from exhaustion. But the worst thing of all is the thirst. It torments him.

But then to his great joy he sees an oasis up ahead. His spirits soar. He sees trees. These will give him shelter, perhaps food as well. But the one thing he desperately needs and desires is water. There will surely be a well there. He reaches the oasis, finds many other desirable things, but no water. The well has dried up.

Most people look forward to Christmas. It's a kind of oasis at the end of another sometimes burdensome year. However we, too, might have all the outward trappings – the lights, trees, candles, cards, gifts, decorations – but no “water”. There is no Christ. From a Christian point of view if Christ is not there, then Christmas is only a mirage. It is like an oasis without water.

I remember once as Christmas approached discussing its meaning with a group of young people. In the group was a middle-aged woman whom we unconsciously but carelessly tended to ignore and omit from our discussion. When we each had said our piece she began to speak, and when she did we all listened intently.

She told us that she was dreading the approach of Christmas. She had been an only child but her parents were long since dead. She had no aunts or uncles. No close relatives. She was all alone, the last of her family. She had friends, yes. She exchanged cards and gifts with them at Christmas time. But somehow none of them ever thought of inviting her to their homes on Christmas Day. They did invite her on Boxing Day, but never on Christmas Day.

So how does she spend Christmas Day ? Mostly on her own, though she is by no means a recluse. After an early morning Mass she goes out to help in some voluntary work for others. Then she comes back, cooks dinner, and eats it on her own. She switches on the TV, but even its bright shows fail to raise her spirits. TV is no substitute for having someone with you.

She cries a lot. She just can't help it. Towards evening, as darkness sets in and the lights of a million Christmas trees come on, she goes for a walk. But on Christmas evening it's lonely out of doors too. The streets and parks are deserted. All doors are closed. She tries the door of her local Church but that too is firmly locked.

But then she told us how in the midst of her loneliness and tears she feels very close to Christ. She feels close to his sufferings. She realizes that in a very real sense he was an outsider at the first Christmas – there was no room for him at the inn. And even though her tears continue to fall, she feels an inner happiness that is impossible to describe or explain. Why ? because Christ gives a meaning to her loneliness and pain. He is her Saviour and her Brother who came to share our lives, to help us carry our burdens, and to walk the road of life at our side. That is the meaning of Christmas.

Here was a woman who in fact had the core of Christmas. Christ was with her. And even though many of the trimmings were missing, she had the essential thing. She had found an oasis, and even though it lacked some of the superfluous items, it had the one thing necessary – water !

Is Christ at the centre of our celebration of Christmas ? If not, then for us too there is no water at the oasis.

May that same Christ bless you at this Christmas. May it be a wonderful experience for you and for all those you love and may you reflect the love of Christ in your celebrations on this special day.