

Happy Christmas-Can't Miss

For Christmas to be what Christmas should be, we need to be prepared to receive God's love in our lives, and to give that love we have received from God to others. We do this by living the first commandment every day.

*“He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ **This is the greatest and first commandment.**’ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”* (Matthew 22:37-38)

Every day should be Advent for us. We should be preparing ourselves to meet the Lord every day of our lives. The Fathers of the Church would say that if we are not prepared for the second coming of Christ, we won't be prepared for the first coming of Christ(Christmas).

St. Paul would say that we are spiritual athletes. A good athlete doesn't begin preparing for his event a day or week or month before the big game. To do well when the time comes, he will have been preparing himself every day, for many years. We should be preparing for the second coming of Christ(our last chance to meet him as a friend) every day of our lives by prayer, study, and good works of charity, and especially, mercy love. Then our Christmases will be very happy ones always.

In 2009, this fact was impressed upon me more than ever before in my 78 years of life, 31 years of priestly life; the last 19 years serving in prison ministry, in five prisons in Texas.

What makes the best Christmas possible?

I had a very interesting Christmas in 2009. A complete disaster, in every worldly way. However, if I was looking to see the goodness of God working in my life and in the lives of others, it very easily could have been the best Christmas of my life.

On the morning of December 16, 2009, I was driving through Jacksonville, Texas on my way to a Doctor's appointment (Dermatologist). I was driving along the Main road in Jacksonville, when a pickup truck came out of a side road in front of me. I hit my brakes, but was unable to stop before I hit the truck.

Everything seemed to go wrong after that. I won't attempt to tell you every little detail, except to let you know that I hadn't been able to obtain a rental car from my insurance company(not their fault), for two weeks so that I could drive to the prisons 15 to 20 miles from where I live.

The body shop that was going to fix my car was so slow in starting the job, that I took my car back from them, a week after the accident. One of my headlights was knocked out in the

accident, so I couldn't drive at night to celebrate Holy Mass in Coffield Unit on Thursdays.

I told a former parishioner about my predicament a few days after the accident. He told me that he wanted to help me, as much as he could, to go to the prisons. Before I took my car back from the body shop, this man (a retired guard from the Gurney Jail Transfer Unit) drove me to Powledge Unit one Sunday, and waited for me for three hours at the highway gate, while I was celebrating Holy Mass and hearing confessions in the prison. Then he took me back home to Palestine. He also would take me to the store, so I could buy some food, and to the post office, so that I could pick up my mail.

I was able to celebrate Holy Mass on Christmas Eve in Coffield Unit; because this man's wife let me drive her 2008 Mercury that night. I didn't have my car back at that time, so I mentioned to my friend that I was scheduled to go to Lufkin to hear confessions of Cloistered Dominican Nuns next week on Wednesday. My friend told me that he would be willing to drive me to Lufkin (a 140 mile round-trip), and wait 4 to 5 hours while I heard confessions, and then drive me back to Palestine. I was able to use my own car to go to Lufkin; but I know, in my heart, that my friend would've taken me there, if that were necessary.

Some other things happened during this time, to impress me very much. The man who drove the pickup truck I ran into with my car was a very honest person. He reported to his insurance company that he drove out of a side street without looking and I couldn't possibly avoid hitting his truck. He didn't hesitate to take the full blame for the accident. His insurance company had difficulty locating me; because I had left the scene of the accident, as quickly as possible, to keep my doctor's appointment.

A layman, a volunteer who has been coming to George Beto Prison Unit to help me, every Monday for the last six years, drove from Canton, Texas to pick me up in Palestine, take me to the prison, drive me back to Palestine four hours later, and then drive back home to Canton. He drove more than 140 miles, so we could celebrate Holy Mass in the George Beto Prison Unit. Every Monday, he drives more than 130 miles round trip to work with me in the prison.

I received a few donations to help me with my prison work at Christmas. More than that, I enjoyed hearing from a few ex-convicts, telling me that they were doing well. But most of all, I delighted in seeing Christ's goodness in my former parishioners, and in my volunteer from Canton. They certainly welcomed Christ into their lives with merciful love, in the Christmas of 2009.

I thank God for helping me to see not only the fruits of my labor; but most of all, the love of Jesus Christ, in these people.

A wonderful Christmas that I will never forget. If all I could think of was my accident and all of the unpleasant, inconvenient, and unnecessary problems that followed, I would say that this was one of the worst Christmases I ever experienced. However, it was one of my best Christmases; because I was only looking for Christ to come into my life. The people who I saw Christ working in this Christmas helped me and themselves to receive more enduring happiness from the good they did than from any expensive presents they would've received from me or from anyone.

Everyone can have happy Christmases always. Christmas means Christ is living, and

working in our lives. He is in our midst, and we know it, the more we help others to experience his love for them. A very nice prayer for us to realize Christ is in our midst always is the Angelus.

The Angelus

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary

R. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit

V. Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus.

R. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord

R. Let it be done unto me according to thy word.

Hail Mary, etc.

V. And the Word Was Made Flesh.

R. And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary, etc.

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray.

V. Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts; that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His Resurrection through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Angelus is to be prayed three times a day.

6 AM
12 Noon
6 PM