

Dear All,

As you can tell from the extraordinarily long Mass schedule, this is the last bulletin for 2021 and the last of these columns for the year ... and what a year it has been! And what a year it bids fair to be!

More than any year in my lifetime the message of the various angels who crowd the stories of Jesus birth and childhood seems -- more than appropriate -- absolutely necessary: *Be not afraid.*

Of course, like so many things, that is easier said than done. This infernal virus seems to mutate faster than we can keep track of. That is the nature of viruses. Just when one climate crisis fades from view, another is on the horizon. 'We will always have weather'. No sooner does one sensational trial come to a close (never with a universally satisfactory verdict) than two indictments are handed down somewhere else for the same kind of thing. No one seems able to learn except from his or her own mistakes. Deadlock paralyzes government and political differences seem to have invaded even the churches.

Why not be afraid!

I have this thought to offer ... or to glean from the events we celebrate in this holy season.

If we give into fear of the things and people and forces that surround us, we will stop our own ears to the words of hope, we will harden our own hearts against the promise of love, we will close our eyes against the light. Where these happen, despair and hatred and ignorance will become all that we see ... and we will not recognize them for what they are! In the dark, we will think that they are truth, when they are truly lies; we will think that they are reality, when they are actually the end of life; we will think that they are wisdom, when they are in fact just the folly of human self-will.

And, as Jesus said, *If your light be darkened, how deep will the darkness be!*

For, you see, the light of the stars and the messages of the angels and smile of the young mother and the sweet breath of the baby and the silent caring of the father, these are not things that once were and are no more. They have been given to us to be our Christmas gift to the world ... to be our daily gift to the world ... to make of us a gift to the world.

So, as I wish *Merry Christmas!* To you, I wish *you* to all the days that are not Christmas.

Really and truly and 'angelically' yours,

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