



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Christmas 2023

To the People of God of the Diocese of Rockville Centre:

Merry Christmas to you and your families!

In recent years at Christmas, I have meditated on the relationship between the Nativity of the Prince of Peace and the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

I have been especially inspired by Pope Francis' analysis of the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the second chapter of his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. It is powerful and provocative, and I would recommend it for your mental prayer.

The short phrase in the Christmas Gospel narrative in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke reads: "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

"No room for them in the inn." No Good Samaritan stepped up to help the Holy Family. They were ignored and treated perfunctorily and impatiently. Some passed them by. Some pretended not to notice their plight.

Remember too that in the Parable of the Good Samaritan an "inn" is also mentioned. Luke 10 reads: "But a Good Samaritan while traveling came near him, and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him."

The inn that the Holy Family approaches on the way to Bethlehem is a sign of rejection and indifference.

The inn in the Parable of the Good Samaritan is a sign of the Good Samaritan's compassion and commitment to go the extra mile and to make sure that the wounded man is taken care of until he is completely healed.

Contemporary literary criticism might very well emphasize that the use of "inn" by the Gospel writer in both the Nativity in Luke 2 and the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 is not by accident.

In a sense, the phrase “there was no room at the inn” in the Nativity foreshadows and connects with the phrase in the Parable of the Good Samaritan describing the callous indifference of both the priest and the Levite toward the wounded man on the side of the road: “[H]e passed by on the other side.”

As Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*: “Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders.”¹

Our Lady, St. Joseph and the unborn Christ Child experienced the reality of people who decided to be indifferent bystanders.

The Christmas Gospel narrative from Luke 2 poses a question which is posed again later in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10.

Will we be Good Samaritans?

Or will we be indifferent bystanders?

As the Holy Father reminds us, we make that choice every day.

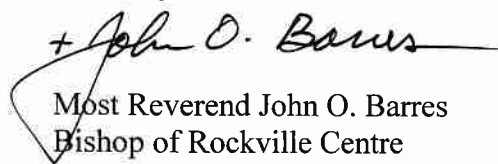
May our prayer, silent contemplation and creative family catechesis of the Nativity scene help us to be instruments of a Nativity Mystery. May the Good Samaritan Gospel revolution of humility, charity, mercy, tenderness and peace unite us in solidarity with the sick, the poor and the suffering, especially in the Middle East, Ukraine and all war-ravaged areas of the world.

May our commitment to “holiness and mission” bless our contemplative Synodal listening and our Eucharistic Revival and Evangelization.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your families!

May the Light and Love of the Christ Child animate and guide our global Catholic Missionary Spirit on this Christmas night and throughout the New Year.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Rockville Centre

¹ Francis, encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, October 4, 2020: AAS 112 (11) 969-1074, at no. 70.