

CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT MASS HOMILY 2018

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As we celebrate Christmas Midnight Mass 2018, we also celebrate tonight the 200th Anniversary of the Christmas Hymn “Silent Night.”

A Jesuit priest Fr. Edward Schmidt retells the story in a recent issue of *America* magazine: “On Christmas Eve 1818, in the church of St. Nicholas in Oberndorf near Salzburg, “Stille Nacht” (“Silent Night”) was sung for the first time. The words to “Silent Night” were the work of Fr. Joseph Mohr, a young priest in Oberndorf. He wrote them in 1816 as a reflection on peace after a summer of violence in Salzburg. On Christmas Eve two years later, he asked his friend Franz Xaver Gruber, a schoolteacher in the neighboring town of Arnsdorf and also the organist in Oberndorf, to set his words to music. Gruber did so, and together that evening at Christmas Eve Mass, the two performed “Silent Night” for the gathered faithful, Mohr singing and Gruber playing the guitar, since the parish organ was not working. “Silent Night” was an immediate sensation...The carol has been translated into some 300 languages. The first English translation appeared in New York City in 1851.”

1818 to 2018 – 200 years. The Hymn “Silent Night” is relatively young historically but it is always new and fresh, inspirational and uplifting every Christmas that we hear and sing it.

When we hear the first bars of “Silent Night” we know, that “Mystic Chords of Memory” are being touched within us, Mystic Chords of Memory that bind us to the Prince of Peace, the Word of God, the Holy Eucharist and the mission of Mercy of the Church to the World.

There is also a mystical partnership between the lyrics, the melody and musical arrangement, and the Gospel of Luke in “Silent Night.”

Biblical Memories of the Infancy Narratives and their Old Testament Foundations are illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The musical arrangement and the lyrics flow like rivers through the inspired biblical narratives in a way that illumines and transforms the faces of the people who sing around us.

On this 200th Anniversary of “Silent Night”, each of us can step back and by contemplating the lyrics of the hymn try to understand why “Silent Night” moves us so deeply.

“SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT”

The first words, “Silent Night, Holy Night,” show us with the Gospel of Luke that Jesus, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, was born into a particular moment of World and Salvation History.

Fr. Simeon, the great Spencer Trappist Monk and Biblical Scholar, puts it so beautifully: “The Child, while present only in Bethlehem, by his poverty and weakness, is already present in the pattern of the constellations by his splendor and his glory.” (p. 76).

Fr. Simeon connects poetically the birth of Christ in Luke Chapter Two with the theme of Christ’s preexistence in the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

“Silent Night, Holy Night.” Silence connects God’s Creation of the World with the entrance of the Son of God in history. And by that entrance, God the Father showed that all human beings are precious to him. On this silent, holy night, it was precisely simple, insignificant and seemingly unimportant people who received the Message of an Angel and Tidings of Great Joy.

In prayer, silence and the day-to-day hardship of their lives, they received a Child, the Wonder-Counselor, the God-Hero, the Prince of Peace.

This “Silent Night”, this “Holy Night” rekindles in us the desire for that Paschal Mystery silence in our daily lives that leads us to be the everyday “practical mystics” that advance the mission of the Church in a spirit of holiness and mission.

“ALL IS CALM. ALL IS BRIGHT”

This fading Year of 2018 is the Year we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. The film director Peter Jackson has released a new documentary on World War I called “They Shall Not Grow Old,” that applies break-through film technology to century-old World War I footage and relies on hundreds of hours of BBC interviews recorded in the 1960s and 70s with World War I veterans. The film rekindles memories of “The War to end all Wars;” the horrors of trench warfare and No Man’s Land; and the poetry of Wilfrid Owen and Laurence Binyon.

The existential despair of the Lost Generation of Americans recovering from the experience of World War I was described by F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* and the recent film version by Baz Luhrmann.

Fitzgerald portrays the self-medicating self-destructive hedonism and frantic North Shore partying as a veil for the existential despair triggered by the horrific World War I experience.

We live almost a century beyond the North Shore that Fitzgerald described but the dynamics of a fallen world’s experience of temptation, sin, addiction self-destruction and despair continue.

The Prince of Peace comes to heal that despair and provide new horizons of hope and holiness.

The Hymn “Silent Night” has been sung and prayed at moments of regional and global war, violence and the horrific experiences of what fallen human beings are capable of doing to one another. It is an appeal for peace in our hearts and peace in our world.

Looking back to Christmas 2014, we commemorated the 100th anniversary of World War I German and British soldiers celebrating a Christmas Day of Truce, coming out of their trenches to the No Man’s Land where they had been killing each other the day before, singing Christmas carols, and exchanging small gifts.

And history records that one of the carols they sang together, each in their own language was Silent Night and Stille Nacht.

The phrase “All is Calm. All is Bright” reminds us that the Prince of Peace comes to bring Peace to our hearts, our families and especially the refugee families of the world, and every troubled and war-torn region of the World.

In a special way in this Christmas 2018, as we sing “All is Calm. All is Bright”, the Prince of Peace comes to bring new Saints, Peace, Holiness and Reform to our Church.

ROUND YON VIRGIN MOTHER AND CHILD. HOLY INFANT SO TENDER AND MILD. SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE. SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE.

Mary’s silent adoration and awe teaches us to see through everyday human events and appearances to the presence of Christ in every situation.

Joseph teaches us rock-solid trust and bold docility in the shifting terrain and unexpected events of daily life.

“Shepherds quake at the sight.” The shepherds teach us simplicity, humility and reverent adoration. And perhaps even more importantly they teach us that Christ comes for all of us. Lonely, forgotten people, the shepherds are the first to “receive Tidings of Great Joy.”

The Wise Men teach us to follow the shooting stars of God’s guidance in our lives with humility, boldness and single-minded purpose and tenacity.

The infant Prince of Peace teaches us that God’s Mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel and the beating heart of the Creche scene.

As the third stanza of “Silent Night” proclaims to us: “Silent Night. Holy Night. Son of God, love’s pure light; Radiant beams from thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace.”

Mercy radiates from the Face and Heart of Jesus. Mercy is the foundation of the Catholic Church’s mission to the world.

We realize in the image of a poor, homeless refugee family and the image of a poor, vulnerable baby that God’s logic in the Incarnation overturns and confounds the narrow logic of human power and calculation.

If in the profound words of Pope Francis, “Families transform the world and history,” then the Holy Family illumines and guides the path of every family at every moment of history.

The Holy Family continues to transform our marriages and our families – right in our daily experiences of the joys, crosses, crises and the unresolved issues of every marriage and every family in a fallen world.

In the midst of the weaknesses and failures of daily family life, we remember the Glory of God that radiates from the manger lifting our families, despite their daily imperfections, to transform the world and history through faith, holiness and a missionary spirit.

When we pray and meditate on the Creche at Christmas, we experience a spiritual rebirth and fresh insights into our daily family routine and our daily family spiritual, emotional and relational patterns.

“Silent Night. Holy Night.” As we celebrate the 200th Anniversary of this soul and world-changing hymn, we open ourselves at this Midnight Mass to the power of the Holy Spirit leading our Church and the power of the Prince of Peace making us instruments of Peace.