THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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WITH THE POWERFUL STRENGTH OF HOPE

CHRISTMAS DURING TIMES OF PANDEMIC

Greetings, dear friends and readers. Today, on the eve of Christmas, I want to share with you a dialogue between a grandmother and her granddaughter. This is a grandmother who knows and understands the human heart from the wealth of experience she has gained from walking the road of life:

“Grandma, if you were my Fairy Godmother, what gift would you give me?” asked the little girl.

“If I were your Fairy Godmother, I would not give you dresses or a carriage,” said the old woman as she smiled at her granddaughter. “Instead, I would you give the gift of KNOWING HOW TO LIVE WITH HOPE. With this knowledge, you would understand from the earliest days of your youth that time passes quickly and, once it is gone, you cannot get it back. You would know never to spend the time you have on anything but a full and meaningful life with those whom you wish, whom you love, and who need you the most.

You would gradually come to understand how to bury the weapons of your internal struggles so that your life would produce Peace for you will see things that you would like to change until the day you die. You would learn how to dance with the winds and tides of change while keeping your feet firmly planted on the ground, rooted in your intention, your dream, and your desire to be very human and very divine at the same time. This way, you will never turn against that huge heart within you which is capable of receiving everything that has life and everyone who comes to you.

That is what I would give you, little one... but you already have a “Fairy Godmother”! It is the very LIFE and LOVE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU.”

Dear friends, even amid the tears of this year, 2020 - one so difficult, strange, hard, and painful for us and, above all, for so many families and elderly persons - it still makes sense to look forward with Hope. The Life and the Light that the Lord of Life continues to hold out to us is where we must ground this Hope.

Even though poverty has gripped the lives of so many people during this year, it has been accompanied by the generosity of many others. Even though people have had to look on silently, “saying” painful goodbyes to loved ones and “embracing” them only with their gaze, it still makes perfect sense for us to wish each other a life built daily on smiles, dreams, and Hope amidst these tears and fatigue. This is what the grandmother taught her granddaughter.

**A stranger in the night**

The feast of Christmas returns laden with Light and with Hope. Even in this year, one most unfavorable to gathering for celebrations thanks to this COVID-19 which does not seem to want to leave us, the crib in Bethlehem appears before our eyes and our memory with all the essentials of our humanity. Thanks to the suggestion of a passer-by, whose name has remained hidden for all the ages, Mary and Joseph find a cave which was being used as a stable where they could spend their last night of vigil, awaiting His Birth. It is here that Jesus was born in such absolute poverty.

Artistic iconography has surrounded this holy family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph with angels and stars. Yet how many fears and how much trepidation were also present! Today, magazine photos show us children alone and abandoned in their innocence, helplessness, and weakness. Christmas places before each of us the eternal values brought by this Incarnate Child to a hungering humanity, sometimes sick with illness and devoid of attainable goals and perhaps even seemingly devoid of a compass that gives direction to life. It is a humanity that feels more fragile and powerless during a pandemic. It is one that needs Hope, a Hope that is born in the depths of our humanity for it is made in the image and likeness of the God Who is Love.

COVID has forced us to slow the growth of our relationships, locking ourselves in, while the Baby Jesus invites us to open up, to give our life, or part of it, to others. His is a Light that is combined with Love. For this reason, the Feast of Christmas also helps us to live amidst precariousness, limitations, and illness and helps us to start over again each morning with faith and with Hope.

For the Christmas greetings that I composed to send to some friends, I chose a very brief and profound text from Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical, *Spe Salvi*. (*In Hope We Were Saved*. Rm. 8:24)

I share these words now with you for they tell us precisely how life is a journey and a goal and what travelling on the ocean of history is like: sometimes lived amid storms that bear the name of the “COVID Pandemic” or some other “pandemic” that we endure every day and how much damage they can do. This is a journey guided by true stars: the people who radiate Light and Hope until we reach the One Who IS the Light par excellence, Jesus the Lord, the Son of God and Son of Mary, Who pitched His Tent among us on that very first Christmas night.

This is the greeting; these are the beautiful words:

Human life is a journey.

Towards what destination? How do we find the way?

Life is like a voyage on the sea of history,

often dark and stormy,

a voyage in which we watch for the stars

that indicate the route.

The true stars of our life are the people

who have lived good lives.

They are lights of Hope.

Certainly, Jesus Christ is the True Light,

the Sun that has risen above all the shadows of history.

But to reach Him we also need lights close by—

people who shine with His Light

and so guide us along our way.

Who more than Mary could be a Star of Hope for us?

With her “yes” she opened the door of our world to God Himself;

she became the living Ark of the Covenant,

in whom God took flesh, became one of us,

and pitched His Tent among us. (*see* Jn. 1:14)

(*Spe Salvi*, no. 49)

And so, I wish every family, each of you, and, especially those who feel alone and abandoned and yet moved by Hope, a very “Merry Christmas”.

Don Angel