

Merry Christmas



The Nativity – Hans Memling (1435-1494)

COAST CARITAS CHRISTMAS LETTER

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ,

I wish you a very Merry Christmas! I pray that this season will be one of peace and filled with the consolation of God.

For many years, I have had a great love for Flemish art, of which the painting above is an example. The northern European use of color, realism, and symbolism is profound. We see Mary, Joseph, angels, and even beasts in adoration of the Child. Jesus is naked—there is nothing duplicitous, nothing hidden about his dwelling among us. He is radiant love, completely accessible. Indeed, many Flemish paintings of the same period show the child Jesus emitting glorious light that makes even Joseph's candle appear dim. Jesus is lying on the floor—he has come to us in complete humility; he is our kingly servant who, like the beasts behind him, will be led by men—even to death on a cross. Even the angels, whose nature inspires dreadful awe when they appear throughout scripture, fall before this helpless one. May this painting be a silent reminder of Whom we celebrate this Octave of Christmas.

Normally I send a meditation with each newsletter. Instead, I would like you to perform a five-second thought experiment with me. First, a bit of background:

I believe that one of the greatest proofs that we were made in the image and likeness of God is that we have the capacity to forgive and be forgiven. When we extend and receive forgiveness, we experience an incredible peace. When we are merciful and choose to forgive, there is a moment when it seems we have been elevated beyond our mere human nature. Not that we become God, of course, but we have a glimpse of the supernatural Source of our being. If we are Christian, we know God's forgiveness of our sins is dependent upon our forgiveness of the sins of others. Having worked with a healing ministry at my parish, I can attest that many difficulties are overcome when someone finally forgives one who has hurt him.

Now we are ready for the experiment. Is there someone you need to forgive, or someone you need to ask for forgiveness? It's a five-second experiment because, if there is forgiveness needed, a concrete example just came to your mind. Commit to giving and receiving a truly great gift this Christmas, and act on that example. For myself, I must ask your forgiveness for any time when I have not been a true witness of what I profess to believe and live. Please pray for me, and I will be doing the same for you.

Let us go forward now, to dwell in the very fire of His Love,
Matthew Manint