

**HOMILY FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD
CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT MASS**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois
December 25, 2018**

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“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests (Luke 2:14).”

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be here with you gathered in prayer for this Christmas Midnight Mass. *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.* This is the very last sentence that we have just heard in Saint Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus. Sometimes it is translated as, *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people of good will.*

This is the message proclaimed by God’s messengers, the angels who appeared to the shepherds in the fields on the night Jesus was born in Bethlehem:

Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people of good will.

This is the basic message of Christmas. It is simple, yet profound; familiar, yet far from the current reality of this world.

Glory to God in the highest. The angels know that giving glory and praise to God comes before anything else, yet so many people live as if God did not even exist.

Peace on earth. Peace is one of the deepest longings of our hearts: to live in a world that is not marked by violence, warfare, gang killings and senseless shootings. Closer to home, we long for peace and harmony in our relationships with family members, friends and neighbors.

People of good will. Does anyone today even recognize who “people of good will” are? The Bible understands “people of good will” to refer to those who are well disposed to hear the Word of God and take it to heart in the way they love God and neighbor. In our world today, our high-speed technology connects people instantly, and even the name “social media” is intended to express the way these media connect us with each other socially, but too often these postings and tweets are expressions of outrage from political enemies that seek to sow the seeds of division, hardly messages of peace from people of good will.

In the December 1st issue of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Lance Morrow, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, wrote:

Outrage is reductive, easy to understand. It is an idiom of childhood—a throwback even to the terrible twos. The various tribes have broken off negotiations with all differing points of view. They excuse themselves from self-doubt and abandon the idea of anything so weak as compromise or, God forbid, ambivalence: No other perspective could possibly be valid. Americans have lost tolerance for the 51%-to-49% judgment call, even though that's about the margin of their disagreement on almost everything. People give themselves over to the pleasures of self-righteousness and self-importance that come with being wronged when you know you're in the right. Among the civic emotions, outrage is a beast of the prime; to harness outrage is to discover fire.

To be sure, there are times when anger and indignation are justified, such as when Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple (cf. Matthew 21:12). But Our Lord did not live in a constant state of outrage, saving His righteous anger when needed to correct a truly wrongful situation. Similarly, if outrage is our daily attitude toward the world and the people we meet in it every day, not only does such predictable indignation lose the force of its power, but it leaves chronically angry people in a state of unhappiness for themselves and all those around them.

According to an article in the August 2016 issue of the *Journal of Adolescence*, “Adolescents who used social media more – both overall and at night – and those who were more emotionally invested in social media experienced poorer sleep quality, lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression. Nighttime-specific social media use predicted poorer sleep quality after controlling for anxiety, depression and self-esteem. These findings contribute to the growing body of evidence that social media use is related to various aspects of wellbeing in adolescents.” While social media can indeed have the positive benefit of connecting people to their family, friends and wider community, it can also have a dark side that can be quite detrimental when misused. Parents should monitor their children’s use of the internet for the good of their mental health and well-being. Adults should also be mindful of their own usage and potential misuse of social media.

Perhaps a simple way to make your Christmas more peaceful would be to limit your use of social media tomorrow to sending and receiving Christmas greetings. Indeed, a healthy New Year’s resolution would be to use social media only for the purpose of sending messages of *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people of good will.*

The shepherds hear this message from heaven, from a world above and beyond their own, a message that will inspire them and add a new dimension to their lives. The song of the angels is not a concert performance to bring a little cheer to the shepherds on that first Christmas night; it is, rather, the song of the blessed that is constantly being sung to God.

This reality is evoked at every Mass. During the Preface, some aspect of God's saving work is recounted. Each Preface closes with these or similar words: "And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the Hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory." At that moment, as we join in the "Holy, Holy, Holy," we are with the shepherds in the fields, adding our voices to those of the angels: "Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest!" This hymn changes everything for us, and is the key to our life and our faith.

The Word became flesh on Christmas Day. Jesus becomes the Bread of Life at every Mass. May he be reborn in us today, and through us be reborn in the world in the days ahead, bringing *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people of good will.*

May God give us this grace. Amen.