

Homily for the Annual Simbang Gabi Novena

Friday of the Third Week of Advent

December 21, 2018

Blessed Sacrament Parish

Springfield, Illinois

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here as we celebrate this Mass with the members of the Filipino community in conjunction with the annual *Simbang Gabi* novena.

The Lord and Ruler will be coming soon, and his name will be called Emmanuel, because he will be God-with-us. These words, from the the text of the Entrance Antiphon for our Mass today remind us, once again, that the coming of our Lord is drawing near. During this Advent season, as the Church accompanies us towards Christmas, she helps us to direct our thoughts toward the coming of our Lord, both at Christmas as well as His second coming at the end of time, when He will judge the living and the dead.

Let us not, however, lose sight of reality of God's presence in our lives each and every day in the world around us. As you know, the word

'Emmanuel' means "God is with us." This is the great message of Christmas. It is not just a remembrance of a past event where God was with us when He was born and then lived on earth for the next 33 years. Nor is it just our hopeful anticipation of His coming at the end of time. Christ is with us in the here and now, at all times and in every circumstance.

As we reflect on this realization that our Lord is always with us, let us take stock of our Advent preparation. Have we taken the time during this Advent season to recognize the presence of our Lord around us or have we simply gotten caught up in the commercialism of this pre-Christmas season? If we fall into the latter group and have not taken the time to make a straight way in our lives for the coming of Christ, let us renew our commitment to living as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world and in doing so, open ourselves to receive the grace that God is offering us in these final days of Advent.

Our late Holy Father, Pope Saint John Paul the Great, echoed this call again and again throughout his pontificate, *Open wide the doors to Christ!* Furthermore, he encouraged us to have confidence in our Lord, to *take the risks of following him. Obviously, this demands that we should come out of ourselves, or our own way of reasoning, or our prudence. It demands that we leave*

behind our indifference, our self-sufficiency, those un-Christian habits that we have perhaps acquired... And Let Christ be for us the way, the truth and the life,¹ so that we might bring the presence of our Lord to those around us.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we draw close to the celebration of the birth of Lord, let us be reminded that, by His entrance into the world, He has come to remain with us. His birth has brought a great light to *the people who walked in darkness.*² As we will hear in the Gospel on Christmas morning, *that light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*³ No darkness will overcome the light of Christ dwelling among us. Christmas is a time for us to renew our faith in that promise and to remain steadfast in following that light which leads us to Him in Heaven. So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, during these final days of Advent, may we open our hearts to be prepared to welcome Emmanuel, God with us, at this Mass, at Christmas, and every day of our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Cf. Saint John Paul II, Parc des Princes, 1 June 1980

² Isaiah 9:1

³ John 1:5