

The Joy of Crib is the Joy of our Hearts

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The story goes back to A.D 1223. It is the story of a poor person living in an Italian village Greccio. People in the village and the nearby town were busy preparing for Christmas. The poor man was troubled that all Christmas preparations were materialistic and earthly. People were busy buying gifts and exchanging gifts. The poor man saw that all the Christmas preparations were for parties of eating, drinking and dancing. There was no place for baby Jesus who would be born on Christmas night!

The poor man was much troubled seeing all these activities and preparations without any place for baby Jesus. There were also a few other people like the poor man who all wanted to give baby Jesus importance in their Christmas preparation. So under the leadership of this poor man they gathered, brought few animals with them and they recreated the crib in which Jesus was born at Bethlehem in the beginning of first millennium.

That was the very first Christmas crib made by the poor man, Francis Assisi and his companions. Today St. Francis Assisi is known all over the world as the saint of the poor. He became still more known when on March 13, 2013 Cardinal George Bergoglio took the name of Francis when he was elected Pope, the supreme spiritual leader of the universal Catholic Church and the head of Vatican City.

After St. Francis made the first crib, the practice of making cribs for Christmas gradually spread all over Europe and to the rest of the world. Some 600 years after Francis Assisi made the first crib, there was a poor parish priest, John Vianney who was thrilled to see the recreation of a crib in his parish. Moved by the Spirit he preached an inspiring and memorable sermon on Christmas night. Saint John Vianney's collected Christmas sermon and other sermons are published in 1901. I read St. John Vianney's sermon on Christmas on the internet.

I am presenting here a gist of John Vianney's Christmas sermon in my own words. St. John Vianney specially said three things of humility concerning Christmas. First, the Trinitarian God decided that the second person Jesus will become a human being. Second, the birth of the second person will not be in a king's palace or in a royal bungalow of a millionaire. There was no place for Jesus to be born even in an inn at Bethlehem. But Jesus was born as a helpless child in a crib. Third, Jesus was born in utter poverty and want. When Jesus was born there was neither bed of roses nor soft silk cloth for him. The Bible says, Mother Mary "gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger" (Lk.2: 7).

Being born in the midst of poverty and want, Jesus proves to us, as the prophets foretold, as an angel told Joseph in a dream, that "he will be called Immanuel", which means, "God is with us" (Mt. 1: 23). Being born in a crib as a poor helpless child, Jesus proclaims that he is with the poor and the rich, with the small and the big people, 'with blacks and whites, in short, with everyone. Jesus is with the entire humanity. Jesus is with the entire universe.

St. John Vianney says in his sermon that "The heathens have represented Jupiter with lightning in his eyes, falcons at his feet, flaming swords in his hands; no hand free to bless. Our divine Saviour wished to appear very differently. Not a threatening, mighty figure; not armed with lightning. No, He appeared as a child full of love, full of tenderness, full of joy. The child looks at every one; at the sight of the child, all fear vanishes. All may approach a child without fear, the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned, rich and poor. How near has God come unto us!"

Lying in the crib baby Jesus looks at us. When Jesus looks into our eyes and when we look at him, all our fears and worries disappear. There is no place for fear in our heart because Jesus has taken place in our hearts. There is no thread of danger in the presence of baby Jesus. The baby Jesus invites us to be with him, all people of all languages and cultures, all tribes and races. Whatever be our background and our problems, Jesus has come to be one with us. In the words of St. John "Word become human being and full of grace and truth, lived among us" (Jn. 1: 14).

From the historical point of view Jesus was born about two thousand years ago as a human being. But for those who believe in him, Jesus is born constantly in our hearts. So in his presence we experience his love, his forgiveness, his understanding and his peace in our lives. When we look at Jesus in the crib let us experience the unconditional love of Jesus for each one of us. Let the fullness of love fill our hearts and let it come to our lips through a smile and let us spread that smile of joy as we meet people.

Let us express the joy of baby Jesus in the crib through our joyful words of greetings: Happy Christmas.

Last change : 16-12-2016
Next change on : 01-01-2017
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