

Christmas 2019
Rev. Thomas W Wyrsh
Jesus is Our Friend

I want to start this evening by talking to our children. I want to get someone maybe from the second or third grade. I know a lot of the kids that are here tonight and I have a question for you who would like to help me? Okay Audrey, let's go with you. You look lovely tonight, by the way, Look at her, folks.

Audrey, do you have friends? And I ask your parents, does Audrey have friends? I'm sure she does. I know Audrey from second grade. I see the second grade a lot for first Communion work, and first reconciliation. I know Audrey very well. I'm sure she has friends. So Audrey, you've got a lot of friends, but don't you have one or two friends that are kind of closer to you, more special than just everybody in class.? Okay then, who are they, what are their names? Tessa and Violet. Okay, I know Tessa and Violet very well too, they're really neat kids. So want to ask you Audrey, you see all the other kids up at school. Is that the only place you see Tessa and Violet? Or do you see them some other place? OK, where else do you see Tessa and Violet? Ahh! They invite you over to their house. And do you invite them over to your house? Okay. Which do you like more, do you like going to their house or inviting them to your house? You actually like it more than going over to their house. But Audrey, that's very generous of you to do that, because when you go to their house, you give up everything of yours for a little while. You give up your PlayStation or Xbox, your dolls or your games, your room, whatever you may have at home. Your little brother who you love. You give up all that to go to their house. That's very special for them, I know. And when they come to your house it's special. It makes it different. It's a different relationship than just all the kids in school. Something happens when someone will come into your home, right? They leave their games, their brother and sister and their parents and their room that they love and come to your house. It makes that person a very special friend right? Okay good, thanks Audrey.

Folks, that's it! That's Christmas tonight. This may seem like child's play, but it's really what Christmas is for all of us. Jesus came to our home. Jesus came over to be with us, to play with us, to talk with us and pray with us. And it was really a sacrifice to do this. . I don't know if we appreciate this fully. It was such a sacrifice, you know, Jesus really left heaven. He lived in eternity with the Father and the Spirit the Trinity lived all those centuries—they didn't even have time, to call it that-- in eternity together. And the Father said "Son, I want you to go down there. Those people need you." And the son, out of obedience, left heaven and came to earth. Now I think we might think that he was up there still in heaven, looking down himself on earth. No, he left heaven. Paul's letter to the Philippians says, "He emptied himself of godliness". He emptied himself of godliness in heaven; he left the perfection of heaven to come down to be with us. Talk about leaving our home and our room-- he left heaven to be with us, so that he could relate closer.

If Jesus had not come, God would always have been this idea in the sky, or somewhere far off, but not close to us. But he came to be close to us. So he left heaven, and instead of being in

eternity like he was, he came in this one little body that we love, that we see at Christmas time. This one little finite body. And the entire spirit of God was contained in this little body.

But he had to break through that to be in relationship with everybody. So went through his life talking and teaching and healing and all those things. We know that he was badly treated. And he went through death, a horrible death; but every human goes through death, He did it so that he can be with all of us again. Because from his cross, he said. "Now I deliver over my spirit"—that's what St. John said. From the cross he delivered over his spirit to all in the world, so that he could relate to all. Then they went through Pentecost where we see clearly how the spirit of Jesus was active. The praying in tongues, and the preaching in the community.

So this is the lifecycle of Jesus as our friend, to leave heaven, to come to earth so that we might have contact with him and go through death and resurrection to relate to all. So again that's it. All I'm doing this Christmas is, I invite you to reflect on your relationship with Jesus. We don't tend to talk that way as Catholics-- other people do, at least at sometimes. But for us as Catholics, and I look out this evening and see many many faithful lifelong Catholics and strong members of our parish, for years and years you've been here every week to worship, to take part in the parish in so many ways. And I know that you feel you're good and faithful Catholics, and you are. Well, try it a little bit different: in case you have done this--and some I know in our parish have-- in case you haven't done this, in a different way than just saying I'm a good Catholic, say "I have a relationship with Jesus." He came to live, and he died for me, that he might be available to me and to the church. And I have a relationship with Jesus!

There are others in our church tonight who are good Catholics, and you try your best to be regular; maybe its family or work or other things, and you may not always be able to get to church every week, but you know that you're the best Catholic you can be, and I affirm that, and you are. Let's not look at it in terms of how good of a Catholic you are, or whether you could be a better Catholic. Let's look tonight at, you have a relationship with Jesus. You do have the relationship with Jesus. That's why he came at Christmas for us.

There may be others that are coming that you don't have a foot down on this faith thing right now; maybe you came to be with a girlfriend or boyfriend, or with your family. You don't know how you are as a Catholic. That's okay. You do have a relationship with Jesus. Whether you call it that or not, Jesus came in order that he might be available to you.

So this may not seem earth shattering, and again some people already look at their life this way. We've been talking about this in Evangelization--a different kind of a framework for our faith: not just how we are as a Catholic, but that I have a relationship Jesus Christ. After all, you know what he said the Gospels-- He didn't say I came that you might obey laws. He said "I came to call you friends, and if you do what I command you and teach you I will call you friends", and you will be my friends.

You don't have to be some kind of religious nutcake to talk about this relationship you have with Jesus. In fact you've been relating to Jesus all your life. If you've been baptized, at your Baptism you were conformed to the person of Jesus Christ. Your inner self was put in Christ; you died to this world, and you rose up again to a new life in Christ. That's what you've been

living. When we have our funerals, we love to look back on that person's life and reflect on how good they've been about living the life of Jesus, dying and rising and living as a friend of Jesus.

If you had First Communion—I'd love to know how many of us here remember our First Communion. I can vaguely remember it. At first communion, do you remember the excitement you had? And if you don't remember, come to our First Communion this April. Everybody's welcome to attend. Audrey and Violet and Tessa and others are going to be there and boy, will they be excited. They always are, every year. And they're not excited because they do some practice or follow some program. They will tell you they're excited to meet Jesus, and to receive Jesus! They get this relationship when they make their First Communion.

So as we grow, all the rest of us, what do we call the community we pray in but the body of Christ? That's who we relate to when we come to church. We relate to the whole body of Christ. And when we receive communion--what an intimate act of friendship. Think about it. Jesus Christ that this is his body, and we take and eat, we take him into ourselves. How intimate that is as a relationship.

Some might say, well Father, this is a nice image. It's kind of an analogy or a comparison to a real relationship. *This is a real relationship we have with Jesus Christ!* as real as any. He did come to earth, and he spent life as a human, and he's left these ways to be in contact with him until the great time at the end of time. Even though his body as he was on earth is not physically present, we relate to him as we do to anyone in our life. It struck me this week in preparing for this, that you know, the people that are close to us in our lives, we normally spend at least as much time separated from them physically as we do when we're right next to them. Absence is a part of our relationship in which we think about them, and have our memory, and our longing and our joy, or even try to work out some problems while were apart for a little while. So while the human, earthly body of Jesus is not present with us, we relate to him as we do to anyone in our lives. It's that real of a relationship.

So again folks that's it—I'm calling you to what perhaps may feel new, to a higher awareness that you have a relationship with Jesus Christ because of Christmas, and that you've been living it. This is not just me saying this. We've been going over Pope Francis' document on The Joy of the Gospel. In one of the first pages he says: "I call every Christian (not only Catholics) I invite every Christian to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ"-- a renewed encounter, meaning that you already have encountered him. A personal encounter, a real encounter with Jesus Christ; and by the way he says, "Renew that every day." So he calls us to this renewed personal encounter, our relationship with Jesus Christ.

So that's it, again. And to help you with that, and in talking with our staff the last couple of weeks, we came up with a card to give you for a Christmas present. I'm going to give each one of you this, I', going to personally pass them out and our ushers and helpers will help. It's a little sort of a check card, a checklist card on your relationship with Jesus for Christmas, and to keep it to the year. I like it for your icebox--I still call an icebox, your refrigerator, or bookmark or whatever you want. And you may do very well on the back of this. It's not to highlight any faults, but it's to remind us of some of the ways that we maintain our relationship with Jesus--

individually with use of Scripture, and in the relationship all kind ways. So I'm going to hand these out to you now-- keep it around, go through it to remind you. And you know it struck me that Jesus is doing very well in this relationship with me and with you. Jesus is really holding up his end. So I've got to ask myself, "How are *I* doing, putting energy and work into this relationship?"

So I hope you enjoy these cards, and let's make this Christmas a time that we renew our relationship with Jesus in a very conscious, intentional way-- renew our relationship, and support one another in the body of Christ, as we live with Jesus.