

Is 9:1-6

Ps 96: 1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13

Ti 2:11-14

Lk 2:1-14

*“What time is your Midnight Mass?”*

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As I begin this sermon in the midst of this liturgical ritual celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, I offer, for your reflection, one question.... “What time is your Midnight Mass?”

Now there is a question that perhaps has passed over your lips or has reached your ears. At first, the answer seems a bit obvious....”Why, at midnight, of course!” However, in many worshipping communities the Midnight Mass is anticipated by a few hours and the Vigil of the celebration of the birth of the Son of God is celebrated at various times. Nevertheless, I believe the question is still one which deserves a bit of reflection on our part. Midnight, the middle of the night, signifies the darkest time of our 24 hour period which we call a day. It is a liminal moment between two distinct dates... December 24<sup>th</sup> ends at the point where December 25<sup>th</sup> begins. Our Advent season completes itself where the celebration of Christmas commences. Our four week vigil of waiting in joyful hope is greeted with the prophetic announcement, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!” (Isaiah 9:1)

There is something about the mysteriousness of midnight that has fascinated... and terrified me. A line in a prayer entitled, A Christmas Novena, has always caught my attention and captured my imagination. I was taught this prayer as a child, for we always prayed it as a family from the Feast of St. Andrew until Christmas day. It describes when the Son of God, “was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, AT MIDNIGHT, IN BETHLEHEM, IN PIERCING COLD.”

What a way for The Son of God to enter into history! Midnight was the scary time, certainly not the time for a baby to be born... And if that wasn't frightening enough, the fear factor increases with two more descriptive parts of his birth... It happened in a foreign land (Bethlehem) AND in the freezing cold! THIS is the moment we celebrate the eternal Word being born into human history? A time full of darkness (MIDNIGHT), insecurity (BETHLEHEM... a foreign land) and discomfort (PIERCING COLD). YES! EXACTLY! Because it is a time which cries out for light, security and comfort, for Truth, Justice and Peace... .in a word... a time longing for SALVATION.

And so, anytime that for us is the darkest hour, that is the exact time which we can commemorate God's entrance into the darkest hour of the day. However difficult it may be

for us to see beyond the darkness, it is there where we need most to remember God's birth into our lives. A midnight Mass, celebrates the eternal light breaking the darkness. It is a liturgy, praising and giving thanks to God for the salvific presence of Jesus Christ into our history. Our darkest moments, that is, our midnights don't necessarily come at the end of a 24 hour day....therefore, we don't have to wait until the literal midnight hour to celebrate our Midnight Mass.

Our Midnight Mass is when we can celebrate with courage the fact that JUSTICE diminishes the darkness in our lives. When we can be comforted by the PEACE which the presence of God brings to our most painful periods. When we can be secure by the gift of TRUTH in those most unsure moments of our journey.... We remember...Emmanuel... God is with us!

St. Augustine in one of his Christmas sermons encouraged his congregation to respond to Christ's breaking into the darkness of the world through action. He states: "So then, because Christ is truth and peace and justice, conceive him in faith, give birth to him in works, so that what Mary's womb did for the flesh of Christ, your hearts may do for Christ's law." (Sermon 192, 2) That also can be our response in our remembrance of Midnight Mass.... As we celebrate Christ's birth into our darkness, we continue to give birth to Christ, as his body, in the way we respond with Truth, Justice and Peace in our lives and in the world around us.

Midnight Mass, is it just a passive moment? Or is it something which we continue to actively celebrate in our lives? To repeat my question then which I posed at the beginning of this sermon.... "What time is your Midnight Mass?" Perhaps it is this liturgy here in the first hours of December 25<sup>th</sup>.... Or perhaps we can recognize that we celebrate it whenever our faith allows us to discover the salvific presence of God in our darkest times. When, in our works, we continue to give birth to Christ who is Truth, Justice and Peace. Merry Christmas!

### **A Christmas Novena**

"Hail and blessed be the hour and the moment when the Son of God  
was born of the most pure Virgin Mary,  
at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold.

In that hour vouchsafe, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires,  
through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of His Blessed Mother. Amen"