

Christmas in Bethlehem

I was planning on going to the Holy Land in October of 2019 when the Lord spoke in my heart and asked me to spend time alone with Him. So I cancelled my trip and searched out ways in order to nurture quiet with Him. Going online, I discovered a retreat house in New Jersey called: *Hermits of Bethlehem*. I decided to go there on the last leg of a three-part journey of *going deeper with Him*.

Once there, I settled into my own personal cabin named: *Abba Father*. That was where I would spend the bulk of my day—in silence—listening to the voice of God. And it was in one area of my simple dwelling that I had a chapel where I had the presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament to keep me company as I kept Him company.

The bell would ring at 7 am that I might praise God by reciting the *Angelus* and to begin preparing my heart for Mass. At 7:45 am, the bell would ring again to invite me to come to the Main Chapel for the celebration of Mass at 8 am. The sun was just beginning to scatter the darkness of the night as I walked through the wooded field to attend and to concelebrate Mass.

As I headed down the path, I carried a cooler in which I would pick-up my breakfast after Mass to take back to my cabin and eat in the presence of the Lord. At 1 pm, the bell would ring again to invite me to come to the kitchen and pick-up my lunch and dinner. The bell would also toll at 12 pm and then 6 pm to praise God once again with the *Angelus*. The bell became my daily friend as I laid aside my watch to enter into the mystery of Heaven's time.

I have a custom of removing my watch before stepping into the sanctuary to celebrate Mass. Why? Because I have entered into God's eternal moment, embracing all of time. So I found myself enchanted with this holy ground of the *Hermitage*, not looking at my watch and checking the time, but finding rest in the timeless and passionate heart of the Father. I found peace in the Divine Will as I surrendered my will to the Heart of Jesus.

Outwardly, I was nurtured to go inwardly, to that spot where only the Triune God dwells. Heaven exists within us! How often do we forget! How often do we get caught up in the busy-ness of our ordinary lives, forgetting the

Divine Guest within! How often do we forget that *“love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us”* (Rom 5:5)! Jesus died that He could become Holy Communion (coming-in-union) for us. Jesus died that we might experience Him as Gift, reflecting the face of the Father.

It all began one breathless moment when the world sighed and awaited the birth of a Savior. A baby was placed in the wood of a manger by His Virgin Mother only to grow-up to die on the wood of a Cross accompanied by His Sorrowful Mother. A baby was born in Bethlehem called *‘house of bread’* destined to grow-up to become *‘living bread,’* nourishing and breathing new life into a tired, worn-out world of sin.

St. Jerome once said: “Blessed is the one who possesses Bethlehem in one’s heart and in whose heart Christ is born daily.” The day that I arrived *in* Bethlehem in New Jersey was the same day that my group arrived *in the actual* Bethlehem in the Holy Land. As they *encountered* the birthplace of Our Lord, I *experienced* the birthplace of the Lord in the silence of my heart!

It was in the stillness and quiet of that first Christmas night that the *‘house of bread’* welcomed the birth of the Father’s, Son of Light! Now, it is in the stillness and quiet of that Consecrated Host that the *‘living bread’* pierces hearts and souls, giving birth to the Father’s, Son of Eternal Light!

Love is a Gift, Who is Jesus, reflecting the Gift of the Father. In the 1990s, the Heavenly Father told a mystic: *“Reach inside of you and find the treasure...the treasure is Me. I am the Gift waiting to be unwrapped.”* This Christmas, may you travel to Bethlehem, in the silence of your heart, to open the Gift and in turn become the gift. There is no greater gift to give than the gift of yourself! There is no greater treasure to behold than the treasure of your heart full of God’s love to share with another!

A Bethlehem Prayer

Jesus, gentle and humble of Heart, You are the Bread of Life; help me to live my life hidden in Your Eucharistic Heart in the Presence of our Father united in the love and power of Your Holy Spirit.

Give me a listening heart, a heart to love You for Your own sake, to love You in myself, and to love You in my brothers and sisters as You have loved.

Consume me in the fire of Your Love!

Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word and my Mother, you are the first 'house of bread.'

Help me to live in perfect love by being:

the bread of humility and abandonment to the Father's Will;

the bread of sincerity and truth;

the bread of purity of heart;

the bread of Word and Eucharist;

the bread of simplicity, poverty and littleness;

the bread of silence and solitude;

the bread of prayer and contemplation;

the bread of reconciliation and peace;

the bread of interior and joyful suffering;

the bread of charity and desert hospitality—broken and offered with Jesus to the Merciful Father and shared for the salvation of the world.

Holy Mary, Lady of Bethlehem, Queen of the Desert, guide me in the journey of the Spirit that, together with you, I may participate in the wedding feast of the Risen Lamb until at last I may sing an eternal Magnificat of Love and Praise face to Face before our All-Holy Triune God. Amen.

Desert Father Eugene C. L. Romano
Founder of the Hermits of Bethlehem

Merry Christmas,
Father David