

Christmas Message
from H.E. Archbishop Luigi BONAZZI Apostolic Nuncio

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To welcome and to share the abundance of God

We are just at the threshold of Christmas, a great event which - if we welcome it - is capable of changing our lives. A story by Tolstoy which I learned and owe to Pope Benedict XVI helps me to share the light and life that springs from Christmas:

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian writer, tells in a short story of a harsh sovereign who asked his priests and sages to show him God so that he might see him. The wise men were unable to satisfy his desire.

Then a shepherd, who was just coming in from the fields, volunteered to take on the task of the priests and sages. From him the king learned that his eyes were not good enough to see God. Then, however, he wanted to know at least what God does. "To be able to answer your question," the shepherd said to the king, "we must exchange our clothes."

Somewhat hesitant but impelled by curiosity about the information he was expecting, the king consented; he gave the shepherd his royal robes and had himself dressed in the simple clothes of the poor man. Then came the answer: "This is what God does." Indeed, the Son of God, true God from true God, shed his divine splendor: "he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men; and being found in human form he humbled himself...even unto death on a cross" (cf. Phil. 2:5ff).

At Christmas, as the Fathers say, God worked the *sacrum commercium*, the sacred exchange: he took on what was ours, so that we might receive what was his and become similar to God. Hence the exclamation that resonates from the first years of the Christian era: "Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not

return to your former base condition by sinning" (From a Homily on Christmas by Pope St. Leo the Great).

What is this dignity? It is to have received the vesture of God. The vesture of God is love. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). In becoming man - in the mystery of Christmas - God has clothed everyone with his own vesture. He has placed within us his love. Yes, in you, in me, in every one of us there is not only our own love, that human capacity to love, that sometimes, or often, turns itself into egoism and hatred. Precisely by assuming our human nature and becoming one of us - this is Christmas - God has sown abundantly in every one of us his love, that love of God which is able to win all battles, overcome all difficulties, enabling us to live in peace with God, with ourselves and with each other. How can I not be able to forgive if the love of God is in me, that love which has the strength of the mercy of God?

Abundance. It is true, many are poor, and many have to contend with a shoestring budget to reach the end of the month. Economic abundance is not for everyone. But there is an abundance that all of us have, an abundance that does not cost a cent, it is the most valuable and is available to all. It is the abundance of love. That love which God gives to us and that we can share with one another.

Lord: in this Christmas Season help us to be aware of the abundance that you have placed into our hands! It is the abundance of love, the capacity of giving ourselves, and bringing cordiality, joy and happiness to our brothers and sisters. Each of us is a rich person, carrying within ourselves the abundance of love that can be distributed to others. The world is poor and suffering because this abundance is kept in the safe, rather than given and shared. "Giving of ourselves" is the way to be at Christmas. Lord, help us to wear that vesture you give to us, and to share your love.

Then every day will be Christmas, a beautiful Christmas.

✠ Luigi Bonazzi
Apostolic Nuncio