



From the Pastor  
Epiphany of the Lord  
January 7, 2024

**WHAT IS MY GIFT TO GOD?**

Although the last day of this year's **Christmastime** is on **Monday**, the **Feast of the Baptism of the Lord**, "it all comes down" after the last **Mass** this **Sunday**. Today we recall with great festivity the **Magi's** three highly symbolic gifts by which they proclaim that the **Christ Child** is a **King [Gold]**, a **Priest [Frankincense]** and the **Ultimate Sacrifice [Myrrh, the burial ointment]**. However, the time for **Gift Giving** is never over!

One of my favorite **Christmas Carols** is '**In the Bleak Midwinter,**' a song composed by **Gustav Holst** in 1906, based on a poem by the English poet **Christina Rossetti**, published in 1872. After its highly sentimental reflection on the reality of that first **Christmas**: cold, dank and scarce, without any creature comforts, it turns its attention to us. Like the **Magi**, the **Shepherds**, the **Angels** and the **Virgin Mother**, what we will offer the **Christ Child**? Here's the whole poem:

**In the bleak mid-winter  
Frosty wind made moan;  
Earth stood hard as iron, Water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, Snow on snow,  
In the bleak mid-winter Long ago.**

**Our God, heaven cannot hold Him  
Nor earth sustain,  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When He comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter A stable-place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty - Jesus Christ.**

**Enough for Him, whom Cherubim  
Worship night and day,  
A breastful of milk And a mangerful of hay;  
Enough for Him,  
whom Angels Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel Which adore.**

**Angels and Archangels  
May have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim Thronged the air;  
But only His Mother In her maiden bliss  
Worshipped the Beloved With a kiss.**

**What can I give Him, Poor as I am?  
If I were a Shepherd I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a Wise Man I would do my part,**

**Yet what I can I give Him, Give my heart.**

**THE HEART OF THE MATTER.** As we enter into the last phase of the **USA's Bishops' three-year National Eucharistic Revival**, we are all being challenged to **more fully enter into** the main ways **Jesus now** comes to us: through the **Sacraments**, especially the **Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar**. And since **His Real Presence, His Most Sacred Body** and **Precious Blood**, are **consecrated and received** during the **holy Mass**, and **worshipped** during **Eucharistic Adoration**, these two liturgical actions should take precedence over all others. Even a simple 'visit' to the **Blessed Sacrament** or making the **Sign of the Cross** as we pass by a church in which **Christ is truly present** in the **Tabernacle**, would be a great gift to the **Lord**.

So, too, would be putting more of ourselves into worship. First, of course, we need to be present in **body**; virtual is great for those truly unable to get to church, but it is not an equal substitute. We must also be present in **mind**; simply going through the motions just doesn't cut it! [Nor, must I say, it is helpful to us **Priests**; one of the causes of clergy-burnout is looking at the faces of those who frown, seem disinterested or bored, or who are non-participatory!] Most essential is being fully present in **heart** and **soul**. That truly inspires those who lead us in prayer, and those who worship alongside us. That truly makes the community come alive and encourages others to join us ... which is the ultimate gift to the **Lord**.

Conversely, once we give our **heart** to the **Lord**, the rest of us will more easily follow. Our **minds** will begin to think more in tune with the **Lord**. Our **bodies** will act more in tune with the **Lord**. We will be more willing to accept special ministries in the **Parish**, be they a **catechetical, liturgical** or **social ministry**. And that, in turn, will inspire more people to join us in worship and in ministry. So, in answer to the poem's question, "**What can I give Him, poor as I am?**" are we willing to say, I "**give my heart**" as well as my **mind** and **body**, my **treasures** and **possessions**, my **hopes** and **dreams**, my **present** and **future**?

May this **New Year of Grace, 2024**, be a time of renewal and recommitment to the **Eucharist**, the **holy Mass** and the other **Sacraments**.

In Christ,

*Father Mark*

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