Christmas Message to the Faithful

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation in this Christmas season, the following Scripture passage comes to mind: “While they were [in Bethlehem], the time came for [Mary] to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:6-7).

Mary placed the Christ-child in the manger, the feeding trough for the animals, as the impoverished Mary and Joseph could not find an adequate place to stay in Bethlehem. Yet the symbolism of the place of nourishment, the manger, is not lost on St. Luke: Mary’s “yes” provides sustenance to a world hungry for the presence of the divine. This image would be one of the titles of the child: Emmanuel, God-with-us. In the darkness and cold of the night, Mary offered Jesus as nourishment for the world, a world thirsting for justice and peace, for contact with the divine, for consolation, truth, and light.

Jesus later refers to himself as “the Bread come down from heaven,” and he eventually proclaims at the Last Supper, “This is my body…. Take and eat.” It is clear that God willed to remain with his people as the “Bread of life” (Jn. 6:35) to nourish us in our sometimes arduous journey through life. And it all began in Bethlehem, a town that literally means “house of bread,” as the Virgin places the Christ-child in the manger.

Over the next three years, the Catholic Church in the United States will be engaged in a Eucharistic Revival. This effort at the local, regional, and national levels focuses on helping Catholics understand more clearly the mystery of the Eucharist, to participate more consciously and devoutly in the worship and celebration of the Eucharistic sacrament, and to love more deeply Christ present in the sacramental mystery. Jesus indeed wishes to nourish us spiritually in our journey through life as we embark in faith on a journey, sowing seeds of hope with love along the way to the fullness of the kingdom of God. This Christmas, may we acknowledge our spiritual hunger as Mary, our mother, offers us her Son as “bread for the journey” and accept Him more deeply into our lives.

Bishop Oscar Cantú