



Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap
Archbishop of Denver

Addresses

In final hours of Jubilee, Christ asks us to ‘come follow me’

January 5, 2001
Denver, Colorado

This homily was offered at the 5:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 5, 2001 Mass at Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The Mass concluding the Great Jubilee Year in the Archdiocese of Denver.

The day's readings were:

1 Jn 3: 11-21

Ps 100 1-5

Jn 1:43-51

When the Holy Father first announced preparations for the Great Jubilee back in 1994, he said three things that should frame our understanding of the readings today.

First, he said that “the Jubilee of the Year 2000 is meant to be a great prayer of praise and thanksgiving, especially for the gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of the Redemption which He accomplished” (TMA, 32).

Second, he told us that “the term ‘Jubilee’ speaks of joy; not just an inner joy but a jubilation which is manifested outwardly, for the coming of God is also an outward, visible, tangible and audible event” (16).

Third, he reminded us that our Catholic faith “originates in the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation” and is therefore “the religion of dwelling in the heart of God, of sharing in God’s very life” (8).

The word “incarnation” comes from the Latin words, *in carne*, which mean “in the flesh.” God became incarnate. He became man in Jesus Christ. When the Gospel of John says, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” it means that the Word of God, which was first given to us in the Old Testament, is now spoken to us in a new and final way – in the flesh and blood of God’s only Son.

That’s why the Incarnation is such a great miracle. That’s why Christmas isn’t just a “holiday” but a *holy day* – and not just a holy day, but a season of holy days. Tonight is one of the 12 nights of Christmas, and that should be our greeting to each other: *Merry Christmas*, because God’s son is born in Bethlehem. And because of that birth, everything in the world is different. Hope is possible. God is among us. *In fact, God is one of us.* So the joy expressed in tonight’s responsorial psalm is also our joy — and you’ll notice that Psalm 100 isn’t about “contentment” or “satisfaction.” Tonight’s psalm is alive: It’s about *jubilation and singing*.

Listen to the words: “Make a *joyful* noise to the Lord all the lands . . . come into His presence with singing! Enter His gates with *thanksgiving* and His courts with *praise!*” Each of these is a Jubilee theme. Why? Because the Jubilee celebrates the presence of God. The Jubilee calls each of us to remember that “the Lord is God! He made us and we are His,” and that “the Lord is good, His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.” God promised His people a Redeemer. The birth of His Son proves His fidelity. Now it’s our privilege to acknowledge His gift, and to reform our lives in a way that radiates God’s love, and draws others to the joy of God’s presence.

How do we do that? We find the answers in tonight's readings.

The First Letter of John reminds us that "this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." You see, even in John's time, Christians liked to forget the hard part. They had to be reminded again and again, just like us. It's one thing to talk piously about love. It's a lot harder to live it in the real world, which is why John's letter tells us to love not "in word or speech but in deed and in truth . . . *By this* we know love, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

All of the vast social doctrine of the Catholic faith can be boiled down to this simple truth: We share what we have with others, because they're our brothers and sisters *as children of God*. We love, so that God's love will abide in us. And that's what Pope John Paul meant when he said that the Catholic faith is "the religion of dwelling in the heart of God, of sharing in God's very life." We share in God's life *when we love*. So the Christian faith is a vocation of love. To be a Christian means to *follow Jesus Christ* — and following Jesus Christ means we need to live for others and be willing to die for others, out of love of God. And if we're serious about the Gospel, if we really want eternal life, we don't have a choice, because in the words of the first reading, "he who does not love remains in death."

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus tells Phillip, "follow me" — not, "agree with my ideas" or "endorse my agenda," but *follow me*. Jesus wants action. He wants Phillip's *whole person*, his *whole commitment*, not his polite support. And what does Phillip do? Phillip immediately goes to Nathaniel and says pretty much the same thing, even in the face of Nathaniel's skepticism: "come and see." Nathaniel said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" And Phillip answered, "Come and see." The world says, "Can anything good come out of the Gospel, or the Church, or Christianity?" And like Phillip we're called to say again and again, with all the skill and fidelity we have: *Come and see*.

In less than a day the Holy Father will seal the holy door at St. Peter's and close the Year of the Great Jubilee. All of us tonight need to spend a little time in prayer, asking ourselves *who is this Jesus we celebrate at Christmas?* . . . whose birth 2,000 years ago set the calendar in motion? . . . whose life is the reason we have a Great Jubilee?

Phillip said, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote . . . " Nathaniel said, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

In these final hours of the Great Jubilee, the Son of God, the king of Israel, is speaking to each of us.

And to each of us He says, "follow me."