

A religious painting depicting a bearded man with a white beard and balding head, wearing a red robe, looking down at a child. The child is holding a globe with a gold cross on it. The background is dark blue with a small gold cross visible. The overall style is classical and dramatic.

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CHRISTMAS:  
THE FATHER'S GIFT

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**Christmas: the Father's gift**  
by Father Andrea D'Ascanio ofm cap

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*Non vedo nessuno ostacolo dottrinale  
per la pubblicazione degli scritti  
sul Padre, redatti dal Padre Andrea  
D'Ascanio.*

*21 Settembre 2000*

*J. Galot*

## MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

I have already experienced my “Merry Christmas”.

I “assisted” Domenico while he awaited the birth of his seventh “homemade” child: one Rosary after the other, until we heard a new kind of cry which witnessed the birth of Evelina.

I experienced the “marvel” of Christmas, the wonder of a Life that blossoms, causing a lively commotion: the arrival of the grandparents filled with commotion, the other little brothers’ comments, friends coming and going, the telephone which keeps on ringing and the good news that spreads from house to house, always the same, yet always different: “Three and a half kilos... yes, everything is fine... she has a lot of hair... cute? Yes, yes ...she looks like her mother, thank goodness... But she is cast in her father’s mould... No, she doesn’t sleep, she yells...” Everything has a common denominator: JOY.

I have partially understood the greatest “marvel” of all, the one our Heavenly Father must have experienced when he heard His Jesus’ first cry, at which all of heaven is overwhelmed: the Angels who come to

sing their joy, who bring the good news to the shepherds and perhaps others too; the stars which re-echo the good news to the Wise Men. Heaven and earth, the spiritual world and the material world, compete to communicate the joy of the Life that has exploded.

Yes, Christmas is really an explosion of joy which breaks the dreariness of death in which we are immersed. And which is renewed at every baby's cry that pierces the heavens and arouses in the Father's Heart an ever new "marvel": in every son of man is reborn His only beloved Son, who for love of us was made the "Son of man".

The joy which John Paul II, in his wonderful book "Crossing the threshold of hope", calls the "joy of creation":

*God, who in creating saw that His creation was good (Gen 1:1.25), is the sources of joy for all creatures, and above all for humankind. God the Creator seems to say of all creation: "It is good that you exist".*

I have brought this joyous marvel along with me and I am trying to keep it alive under the bombardment of false life which I meet at every street corner:

the false lights of a false Christmas that looks like a farce, because it is without birth.

Italy has the lowest birth rate in the world; it has dropped below zero.

And I thought back to the time when I was a hospital chaplain, and the daily visit to that world of pain was filled with a smile when I entered the "maternity" ward: the blue and pink bows hanging on the doors dispelled the nightmare of the intensive care unit and the terminal patients. It was life that conquered death and put everything together into a greater harmony. The most beautiful note were the suffering but radiant faces of the mothers who were aware of having fought an existential battle and won it:

*"When a woman is in labour, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world" (Jn 16:21).*

And the mothers welcomed you with a smile, even those who felt obliged to call themselves "atheists", and never opposed Baptism; and when – without their permission – you added "Mary" to the baby's name they looked at you with implicit complicity: "atheist", of course, but belonging to Mary.

I returned to the hospital for a period of time, and it was traumatic going into the “maternity” ward: there wasn’t even one bow hanging on the doors, only five patients (a third of the actual hospital personnel), of which three looked the other way as soon as they saw a Priest. Death now triumphs in that world too, and it has a good fifteen “specialists” at its service.

There were three women who didn’t want to fight their battle and the result is existential anguish instead of joy. The triumph of death.

What is happening? *“Death and life have contended in that stupendous combat”*, and it seems that death prevails: the triumph of Mammon is personified in the flown “Santa Claus” who at supermarkets rings our spiritual death toll with his cowbell.

But it is a fictitious victory: Life, which is God, has already won its battle with death. And Evelina’s cry has confirmed this victory.

We must come to the conclusion that it is time to shake off this fatalistic acquiescence to death which is advancing and fight back. How? His Holiness John Paul II, the great champion of God of these times, has clearly pointed out to us the way to follow: *children!*

**“CHILDREN WILL SAVE THE WORLD!”** said Padre Pio of Pietrelcina many times. This cry of hope has been taking up all our energy for more than twenty years, and we are finally hearing it resound from humanity’s most authoritative voice.

**“What enormous power the prayer of children has!.. The Pope counts very much on your prayers. I decided to ask you, dear boys and girls, to take upon yourselves the duty of praying for peace... The Pope is certain that you will not refuse his request, but that you will join in his prayer for peace in the world”.**

(from the Letter of H.H. John Paul II to children, Christmas 94)

Let us meditate thoroughly on the meaning of these words which have an infinite significance: the Pope, the highest spiritual authority on earth, “entrusts” children with the duty of resolving the only real problem, which is that of peace!

It is as if he said, along with Padre Pio: “Don’t be afraid! The salvation of the world lies in the hands of children: engage them in this battle, and fight with them!”

***If you believe in what we are writing, if you believe in the words of prophets of the stature of Padre Pio and John Paul II, why don't you give us a hand? Why don't you help us to make children pray?***

We are at the end, and each one must do his share. We have the certainty – now more than ever, comforted by the Word of the Holy Pontiff – that we are on the right path.

***“May the Baby Jesus enlighten your mind, your heart and your will”*** (ibid.)

We are now at the last end. We don't hesitate to ask you for help, because we are certain that the battle we are fighting is Mary's and it is the right one.

We won't stop until “everything is accomplished”, until the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is accomplished.

Merry Christmas to everyone.

## THE FATHER AND CHRISTMAS

When we think of Love, total Love, the words of Jesus immediately come to mind: *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends”* (Jn 15:13).

And, in fact, no one can give more than one's own life, which is the greatest good we have.

The martyrs – both in the religious and social sense – are rightfully considered the champions to imitate.

The Gospel, the great announcement of the new covenant founded on Love, continually goes back to this concept, which is concretely expressed by Jesus, our master and model: *“Love one another as I have loved you...”* (Jn 15:12), that is, by giving one's life for one another in a total gift which must be perfected or fulfilled in forgiveness: *“Father, forgive them...”* (Lk 23:24).

Jesus, incarnate Love, began man's redemption by living and giving us his power of Love which has animated the Church right from the beginning.

Love is the supernatural characteristic of the

Catholic Church, and the Eucharist – the total gift of himself which Jesus continues to give us – is the heart of the whole structure of the Mystical Body.

But is giving one's own life really the greatest gift?

### **Christmas: the Father's gift**

What is Christmas?

It's the Son's gift to his lost children so that they may return home.

It's the first Eucharist, which Jesus celebrates in a concrete way by presenting himself and giving himself to us from his first cry: *"This is my body, which will be given to you..."*.

But who offers this sacrifice for us?

We usually say that it is Jesus who offers himself, since he is both priest and victim. But this is not completely true, because we know that by becoming incarnate, he accomplishes the Father's will:

*"Behold I come to do your will, O God"* (Heb 10:9); and *"he became obedient (to the Father) to death, even death on a cross"* (Phil 2:8).

Isaac represents Jesus and Abraham represents the Father who offers and sacrifices His Son.

It is the Father who plans the redemption.

It is the Father who sacrifices His Son.

It is the Father who gives his Son in order to embrace His children again.

*"A child is born to us"*: it is the Father who, through Mary – the maternity of the Father – gives us His Son in an act of total reconciliation, in a marvelous "exchange" between humanity and divinity which unites heaven and earth in a new and eternal covenant.

John, in meditating on God's Love, penetrates this mystery in depth and clearly sees the Father's gift in His Son:

*"For God so loved the world  
that he gave his only Son"* (Jn 3:16).

While we joyfully smile at the sight of the newborn Child, while we admire His Mother who watches over Him in the poverty of the manger, who of us thinks of the Father who gave us His Son?

Who of us says to Him: "Father, thank you for Your gift" and mediates on His suffering?

## Christmas: the Father's suffering

It may seem strange to speak of the Father's suffering, since we were taught that God is "impassive" and that of the three divine Persons only the Son has suffered in his humanity, since as God "he could neither suffer nor die".

If we examine the incarnation with these assumptions we reach the conclusion – with the logic of arm-chair theologians – that it is only an inevitable and decisive strategic move which God came up with in order to conquer evil and deliver humanity.

However, the incarnation is not a game of chess that God plays against "the adversary": it is the most superhuman act of Love and suffering which the Father accomplishes with the assistance of the Holy Spirit and the consent of His Son.

Fortunately, the style Jesus uses in his teachings – and let us always keep in mind that His fundamental teaching is that God is Father! – allows us to perceive the Heavenly Father's Heartbeats by relating them to the heartbeats of every earthly father: the parable of the prodigal son is the greatest example.

What does a father experience when he sees his newborn child? He bursts with happiness, and he holds him tight, with feelings he will never be able to describe.

Our Heavenly Father, seeing His Only Begotten Son clothed with humanity, can't help but pulsate with infinite tenderness. The joy of man's paternity, which the first man took away from Him, is fully given to Him again by Jesus, whose Spirit calls Him "Father" from his first cry.

The birth of Jesus causes a great feast in heaven; the Angels who fill the holy Night with lights and hymns are a tiny echo of the joy that resides in the Father's Heart.

What does a man experience when his only son is called to arms, in the event of war, and sent to the front?

What suffering would this man experience if he knew that his son would be inevitably killed in combat?

Nothing is obscure to the Father. While gazing enraptured at "His" Little one in the arms of his Mother, he has always before his eyes the sight of this Son being rejected, insulted and crucified. And thus begins

the great passion of the Father, which will be united to Mary's passion from the moment in which, in the presentation in the temple, the old Simeon will reveal to her the true mission of her Child.

Together with Christmas begins God's profound suffering which will be mitigated when the risen Jesus returns to His bosom; and it will only end when every man, because Jesus is now in every man, will have fully achieved his own filial likeness in his total return to Him.

The Father's suffering! It is the suffering we cause Him when we don't accept the gift of His Son because we don't accept His Will, because we don't know how to become acceptance, like Mary, in a total and continuous "Yes".

*"Console the sorrowful Heart of the Father"* the three shepherd children of Fatima were told. The same request is addressed to us. Let us fully accept it, like they did, "by accepting day by day whatever the Father may send us".

It will be our daily Christmas, an endless explosion of joy which will radiate from us, because the Spirit of Life will fill us and enrich us. Like Mary.

Through Her and like Her, we will be springs of living water so that Christmas may be fulfilled in everyone; so that a new world may be born; so that the Father may be "all in all" and the Angels may sing with us, their brothers on earth, the hymn of Glory to the Father so that – "as it is in heaven" – His Triumph of Love may finally come "on earth" too.

### **Christmas today: the farce of Santa Claus**

Today what importance do we give to the Father's greatest gift? The mystery of Christmas, whose profound origin is Love and the figure of the Father, has become for most people a sentimental tradition; we are no longer able to grasp its infinite spiritual significance.

Instead, the significance of this mystery of Love has been understood by "someone" who – in his twisted envy – has succeeded in distorting the feast of inner joy into the great Christmas dinner; the feast of the "gift" into the festival of presents; the figure of the Heavenly Father into that of "Santa Claus", even if people try to make him come down from the sky.

Since we are accustomed to accepting everything presented to us without asking ourselves how and why, we have accepted this puppet with the same

supine acquiescence with which we have allowed ourselves to be inundated with Coca Cola and devastated by chewing gum, evident signs of our cultural decay: “Santa Claus” is the most refined vulgar expression of this.

The tree has replaced the manger, the puppet has replaced Baby Jesus: the sign of our almost always unconscious betrayal of the Father’s Gift of Love.

For evidence of what we have stated, let us examine just a few evident aspects of the work of the Father-substitute.

### **Santa Claus: the Father-substitute**

At Christmas, Our Heavenly Father gives us the free gift of His Son, the supernatural expression of His Love.

“Santa Claus” fills us with - anything but free! – gifts which are the material expression of an extreme selfishness.

At the entrance of the Grotto the Angels, with their songs, invite us to adore the Child God and bring Him the gift of our love.

At the entrance of supermarkets and shops, “Santa Claus” urges us, with his cowbell, to come in to give Mammon – the god of wealth – the gift of our Christmas bonus.

The Father reveals to us the gift of His Son in a “great Light” which enlightens minds and souls, in order to make us reflect and walk towards the source of Peace and Love: *“Peace on earth to those on whom his favour rests”* (Lk 2:14).

“Santa Claus” gives us his gifts in a schizophrenia of flashing lights which bewilders our minds and confuses our souls, swallowing us into the shop windows.

The Father gives us His Son through Mary, in poverty and simplicity; however, in that naked Child lies the All which fills and soothes our souls, which thirst for infinity.

“Santa Claus” makes us wrap his gifts in parcels that sparkle, but are full of nothing and existential emptiness.

### **Post-Christmas: the farce is over**

Christmas is over. The Father, who is faithful to His Love, through His Son who continuously becomes incarnate in every Mass, renews the gift of Peace.

“Santa Claus” presents are sold out with our Christmas bonus; our hearts are left with the anxiety of the Light we haven’t accepted, our minds are left with the bitter memory of this puppet who every year gets bigger and more pushy.

As we await another Christmas, which will witness the increase of supermarkets and their prophets – puppets dressed in red – we drag our existence of orphan children of the Father because we haven’t accepted the gift of His Son.

The farce is over.

### **In conclusion**

When will we shake our drugged consciences away from this puppet who, from the top of his “tree”, invites us to look down to earth – where his “gifts” are – in order to swallow us towards materialism?

When will we make up our minds to accept the Gift from Heaven which guides us towards Heaven, towards the Father who continuously gives us His Son so that we, in turn, may become a gift for Him and for our brothers?

Let us shake off the torpor that the false values placed at the bottom of the tree of the false “Daddy”

have caused us; let us rediscover the true values of the spirit which the Father points out to us in the manger: humility, faith, silence, obedience, compliance with God’s Will, simplicity, poverty of spirit, penance and prayer.

Christmas, the Father’s gift... the extreme suffering of the Father and the Son for the triumph of the Spirit of Love for men who, after having understood, will continuously say, by means of the Spirit: “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy...”.

In joy and in suffering, in humiliation and in glory, we must only say one word: “Daddy”, in union with the Son and with the Spirit.

Then we will live Christmas, we will have joy, we will find Peace: the only true “gift” we urgently need and which the Father will give us in the Child who is offered to us, if we accept him with the simplicity of the shepherds, the humility of the Wise Men and the faith of Mary and Joseph.

## CHRISTMAS AND THE MASS

### My Christmas

“Merry Christmas”, that is, “Merry birth!”: it is a wish that is a prayer; we exchanged it with each other, in the unconscious hope that Baby Jesus may truly become incarnate in us and give us Peace. We wished each other that the old man may die and finally leave room for the Son of God so that he may be born in our hearts.

The thousands of nerve-wracking light bulbs no longer flash; the gawky “Santa Clauses”, who have enticed our Christmas bonus in order to convert it into useless presents and lavish dinners, have left the scene and have left us with a greater inner void. These false messengers of Christmas have bewildered and disappointed us, but they haven’t succeeded in putting out the solemn, divine Light of the Star; the numerous parcels hanging on the tree haven’t completely stifled the Gift which the Father has placed in the manger for us; the lavish dinners haven’t satisfied our hunger for infinity which cries in the depths of every man.

On the contrary, they have given us a more intense need for cleanliness, simplicity, the essentials and the manger.

### The manger!

Perhaps we have made one in a corner of our house. However, there are few people who have prepared a manger in the depths of their being, in that “manger” (Lk 2:7) which is our heart and which is the true recipient of Love which comes.

In L’Aquila we experienced something new: for three days, together with friends from various parts of Italy, we prepared for Christmas without big dinners, without noise, without the worry of presents to give and receive, adoring the Eucharist and meditating on the Mass. With Mary, like Mary.

Among a few observations we made, the main one is the following: Christmas doesn’t end with the liturgical cycle, but continues in every Mass, every day; every day is Christmas.

### Every Mass is Christmas

The Mass is not only the “renewal” of Jesus’ passion and death, but also of his incarnation: there cannot be death without birth.

At the beginning of this century there was a priest in Sardinia who died at a very young age, of whom

there is an episode, enlightening in this respect, which was repeated at every celebration: at Communion time he used to remain with the Host in his hand for a long time, without deciding on eating it. As is easy to guess, these pauses – which lengthened the celebration – were not very popular with a few of the faithful, who then appealed to the Bishop.

The Bishop went to the parish and asked the priest about this unconventional behaviour. The reply he received left him perplexed:

-“Your Excellency, after the Consecration I no longer find the Host in my hand, but Baby Jesus in flesh and blood. I cannot receive Communion until he becomes a Host again”.

The Bishop remained speechless, but – strengthened by his authority – forbade the pastor from lingering before the Eucharist at Communion time. And, in order to be sure that his orders were obeyed, he attended one of his Masses. But at Communion time the usual pause was repeated, and the prelate became angry when he heard the murmuring of the faithful who looked at him disappointed and annoyed.

Finally the young pastor ate the Host and went back to the sacristy where the anger of his superior awaited him. At

the end of the storm, he replied with the candour of the saints:  
-“Monsignor, I want to obey, but how can I eat him alive?”

This priest died many years ago, but his experience remains alive in the Church and in our hearts: Jesus is born again in every Mass. Christmas continues in every Mass. Every Mass is Christmas.

### **How do we live our daily Christmas?**

How do we live our daily Christmas in every Mass we attend?

How do we prepare ourselves to receive Jesus? Are we truly pure? Did we confess our sins? Did we say a good confession, acknowledging every sin with sincere repentance, together with the steadfast resolution to avoid committing them again with all our strength?

If we affirm that we believe in Jesus who is alive and radiant before us in the Eucharist, we must live Christmas every day in an ever stronger and more complete way.

We must be true witnesses of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and each time we are before Him

we must ourselves: if in this moment Jesus revealed Himself to me in all His splendour, how would I react?

When we leave the Church we must become apostles of the Eucharist, we must defend the Eucharistic Jesus with all our strength and prevent all forms desecration.

How many people have celebrated Christmas? How many people have accepted the Father's gift? Very few, because the majority of people who say they believe and go to Church DO NOT BELIEVE. If they believed, the continuous desecration of the Body and Blood of Jesus wouldn't take place.

### **We don't believe**

We don't believe. If we believed we should be the guardian angels of the Eucharist and we should bear witness to It.

Do we believe that in every Host there is Jesus, alive, radiant and with His glorious Body which is given to us?

And if we believe that Jesus is present with his whole body in the entire Host and in every particle of It – so much so that when there are not enough Hosts the Priest breaks them into small pieces in order to

give Jesus to everyone – how can we receive Him in our hand, allowing so many pieces to be trampled on when they fall to the ground?

No, we do not believe, because if we believed we would behave before Jesus Host as the Church commands: a profound bow or genuflection when we are before Jesus to receive him; genuflection when we go by the Tabernacle; genuflection with both knees when Jesus is exposed; kneeling down during the Consecration, when Jesus returns among us.

In the East, men who for 70 years paid with their blood even for making a mere sign of the cross, today receive Communion on their knees, living in the depths of their being Communion with God, that God for whom millions of men died, without denying Him in order to save their lives. In the sacristy of the church of St. Louis, the only church open for worship in the city of Moscow, there is a road sign that indicates “prohibited” next to which is written, in many languages: “Communion in your hands”.

We don't believe, because if we really believed we wouldn't tolerate the fact that in many of our churches Jesus remains alone, in filth, hidden and abandoned.

### **If we believed!**

If we believed that we receive Life, at every: “The Mass is ended, go in peace”, we should remain in adoration of the God Life that is in us and absorb him in our most intimate fibres, so that when we go out we may give others the life that vibrates in us.

We must believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and we must live our faith by bearing witness to Jesus’ perpetual incarnation in us. We must allow the Father to make us His “living glory”, as Jesus was.

### **I believe: I must renew my faith in every Communion**

I believe that with the Sacrament of the Eucharist I eat and drink Life in all its forms, with an immense Strength that allows me to conquer every battle, to fight against all storms and to be renewed at every moment.

I believe that the Father wants me alive and vital in the world so that I may bear witness to everyone that God is Life.

I believe that this is the only thing that matters, and I must learn to repeat it always: “In every Com-

munion I eat and drink Life and I can do everything in God”. This is the new man, this is the new Church built upon the unshakeable certainty that God is Life and that Jesus, coming into me, gives me His Power of Life.

This is what I must preach to the world and I must return to the faith of the first Christians, strengthened by 2,000 years of history of the Saints.

### **If I believe**

If I believe and live this, I will give all things and all creatures a Power of Life which will radiate even from a distance.

If I believe this, when death will try to destroy me, I will react with a greater Power of Life, because all my cells will be invaded by an infinite Vital Power.

If I believe this, insofar as I believe, I will live it, and my entire body will release a very powerful energy, which is not tension or restlessness, but a pure vital energy that is communicated to bodies and spirits, to matter and to souls who begin to vibrate with new Power. If I believe this, this is what will happen.

If I believe this, the gifts which the old world has received are a thousandth part of the energy the Father wants to give me today, as a gift for my donation.

If I believe this and live it continuously, the world itself will be able to live this gift.

If I don't believe and live this gift, the world will wait: it is up to me to give life to the world.

If I believe this, I will have to live it in joy and in a new power, which will radiate from my eyes and my face, from my whole body.

If I believe, Love will lead me to love all creatures, to embrace them and give life to them, to never judge them, but to give them the Power of Life which belongs to the Father, but which He gives me so that I may give it to the world with my SMILE OF LIGHT.

And the star of Christmas will shine.

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