

## Fr Kevin's Christmas Homily

### Readings:

1. Isaiah 9:1-7
2. Titus 2:11-14
3. Luke 2:1-14

What words do you associate with Christmas? Many people would say 'family', or perhaps 'love' and 'joy' and 'peace'. Some people might honestly have to say 'money worries' or 'loneliness' or 'family violence'. If that's your situation, I encourage you to reach out for help and support. But this year, as I've searched for words about Christmas, I've kept coming back to another word. Perhaps it's an unusual or even a strange word to associate with Christmas. Even so, let me share this strange word with you today, and invite you to reflect with me about it. The word is 'precarious.' 'Precarious' means 'dependent on circumstances beyond our control'. It means 'insecure' or 'unpredictable' or 'hazardous and risky.' For example, we might say, 'She was seated, and she balanced a cup of tea on a saucer precariously on her knee.' Or 'He prepared for a precarious future.' Let me apply this word 'precarious' to the Christmas story. And then, let me apply this word more briefly both to our personal lives and the situation of our world.

Let's begin by reflecting on how precarious the Christmas story was. Of course, everything worked out in the Christmas story, but that shouldn't blind us to how precarious and even dangerous this story was. And we might believe that God was behind the scenes making everything work out, but that too should not blind us to the very real challenges and difficulties that Joseph and Mary faced. The Romans were conducting a census, and Joseph and Mary were ordered to travel from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judaea to be registered. That's a journey of more than 140 kilometres, or more than 85 miles. Not in a car, but on foot. Even if they rushed, it would have taken four days. But as they walked up and down hills, it probably took about a week. The people along the way weren't always friendly. And there were brigands who attacked travellers, and took everything they had, and left them half-dead or worse. And also, Mary was pregnant. What if she began to give birth on this long journey, far from any help? It was a long, hard and perilous journey. It was hazardous and risky, and therefore precarious. But the little family endured the hardship and the risk, and they made it there to Bethlehem.

But then, there was another challenge. Where would they stay? We sometimes say rather glibly that "there was no room for them at the inn." But think what that really meant. It meant that Joseph and Mary went from door to door first asking and then begging for somewhere to stay. How hard it must have been for Joseph, as he tried desperately to find a place for his pregnant wife to stay! How hard too it must have been for Mary, soon to give birth and perhaps fearful about childbirth which she had never experienced. Eventually, as we know, a place was found. It really wasn't what they would have wanted. But at least the stable gave them a safe place to rest and for Mary to give birth. It wasn't what they wanted, but it was at least what they really needed. Once again, it was uncertain and upsetting. Once again, it was truly precarious. But eventually after a great deal of distress, a solution was found.

But even then, the ordeal was not over. King Herod was threatened by the birth of the newborn king, and he ordered the massacre of all children two years or younger. And so, the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus had to flee – to flee to safety in Egypt. Another long journey. We don't know how far they fled. But if they just crossed the border into Egyptian-held territory, that journey was at least another 65 kilometres or another 40 miles. That journey alone would have taken at least another two or three days. And if they fled as far as the city of Egypt, that journey was even further. And there was the risk of discovery and arrest and the murder of their child. It was another time of great risk – another time when their situation was truly precarious. But once again, the family made it through.

What are the messages which we can learn from all this? First of all, the actions of this little family teach us that especially in times of crisis, we are both much more resourceful than we might think, and far, far stronger than we could ever imagine. The little family teaches us too that little groups of people can support one another even in very difficult situations. We're also taught that other people are kind, and even if they can't give us everything that we want, they might at least give us what we truly need. And if we have the faith to see the hand of God guiding and protecting this little family, we can also learn that God is also with us, and that when we've done all that we can, we can in faith leave the rest to God.

Let's apply these lessons to our own lives. First of all, we do have to accept that our own lives – our personal lives and also the current situation of our world – are far more precarious than we might like to admit. Our loved ones could die, even at this time of year. We or our loved ones might be beset by serious illness or serious conflict or money problems or any one of a host of problems which could afflict us. And at this time the situation of our world is also precarious. Here in Australia, we've all been distressed by an awful act of terrorism against the Jewish community. And the peace of nations is now under more threat than it has been for many, many years. Our personal lives are more precarious than we might like to admit. And at this time, the situation of our world is also precarious.

But let the lessons from the Holy Family speak to us. Especially when we're in a precarious situation, we are both more resourceful and far stronger than we might think. Little groups of people can support one another even in difficult situations. Other people are kind, and while they might not give us everything that we want, often they do give us what we truly need. And whether we recognise it or not, especially in precarious situations, God is with us, and God will always guide us and protect us. May this message – the message of Christmas – give us hope. It's not hope that we'll always be protected from precarious situations. But it is hope that even if we do find ourselves in precarious situations, we truly do have all that we need to find a way.

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