

## Homily of Archbishop Kevin McDonald for Christmas Midnight Mass in St George's Cathedral, Southwark, 2009

At the great feasts of Christmas and Easter, we celebrate and remember the events of the life of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. At Christmas it is his birth, in Holy Week his suffering and death, at Easter his resurrection. At these times we not only celebrate the saving actions of God in history, we also celebrate the fact that we are Christians. The very fact that certain historical events are uniquely important to us is something specifically Christian. It is precisely because the historical events surrounding Jesus are of decisive importance that the events in our lives are important too. It is because the birth of Jesus brought new life into the world that we hope for the new life now, and for the fullness of that life beyond death. What I am saying is that our lives take on their full meaning in the light of Christ, and what is more our conviction that our lives, our personal stories are significant, itself derives from the nature of our faith as rooted and grounded in history, in the history of which Jesus Christ is a part. Hence our belief as Christians in the unique dignity of the human person. Hence our belief in the value of life from conception until natural death, and our horror of war and everything that undermines the dignity of the human person.

All history matters and each individual person's history matters because when God became man in Jesus Christ, God took all history, which means all humanity, to himself. He raised up humanity and gave it the possibility of eternal life; gave us the possibility of release from sickness, sin and death, and the possibility of something new both during life and beyond death.

The Sacraments of the Church are received at certain points in our own history, in our journey through life and each of them, in different ways, gives the context and the promise of a new beginning, a new start. Baptism, at whatever age it is received, means new life. The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives us the possibility of putting our sins behind us and making a new start; Holy Communion provides a new level of intimacy with God – the profound intimacy which goes with receiving the body and blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine. Marriage and Ordination mark special new beginnings in people's lives. Anointing of the sick gives the possibility of healing and looks to the completely new life that we cannot imagine and simply refer to with the word 'glory'.

And here tonight the Lord offers each of you new life: come to the crib which we blessed at the beginning of Mass and receive the new blessing that the infant Jesus will bestow on you. I don't know what the blessing will be, but you all heard the readings and I hope that the Lord has spoken to you and spoken to your situation. I don't know what is going on in your personal life this Christmas Midnight. I don't know what burdens you're carrying, or what hopes you are nursing for next year. But the promise of something new is given to us in our liturgy. It is expressed in the readings in symbolic language but you can apply it to the circumstances of your own life.

Let us just remind ourselves of what we have heard: "The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light". Where do you want the light to shine in your world at this time? That light, remember, is the grace of Christ, which St Paul says has now been revealed to us. The grace of God is received in faith; if we live in it, we will be raised up to live a new life. It will be different – it should loosen the hold for selfish obsessions and addictions, and create a new situation, a new way of being. The gift has been given: it is for us to receive. Let us be open to it simply by being here, and by continuing in our daily lives to be open to the Holy Spirit, open to the Lord who comes.

May you, your families and friends, all be richly blessed this Christmas Season, and may the New Year be a time of grace for you all.