

Christmas Homily 2015

(Explain the four icons in front of church which depict the four feasts of Christmas: The Birth of Jesus, Mary, the Mother of God, the Feast of the Holy Family, the Epiphany. Invite families to celebrate the **WHOLE** season.)

Please look at your neighbor and say: Neighbor, We are just everyday people doing the best we can.

Yes, we gather this evening celebrating the feast of the birth of Christ as everyday people, doing the best we can. Maybe that is why in the well known Christmas story we have just heard proclaimed, we can relate so well to the shepherds. For the shepherds were just everyday people doing the best they could. They lived with their sheep in the fields and vigilantly watched and protected their flock.

They were hard working; doing the best they can.

They hustled every day just to make a living.

The every day struggle of the shepherds reminds me of an experience I had the other day. I was having a meal with a teen and his young adult brother. In the middle of the meal, the teen turned to me and said, "Fr. Don, it's my birthday in two weeks!"

He was being an excellent sales man hoping to get a gift from me.
He already knew what he wanted for his birthday and shared the information with me.

As some might say: He had his hustle on.

Like this teen, We are just every day people, doing the best we can.

During this Christmas season most of us have our hustle on.

Are we not all anxious and hurrying around

- We are weary from trying to get things done,
- we are running out of time,
- we attempt to please everybody around us and knowing deep down in our hearts that the task is impossible to accomplish.

(PAUSE)

Our busyness in this season reminds me of a story told by John Shea, a very good theologian storyteller. He was in the parking lot in a shopping mall and passed a woman who was placing bags in her car saying to herself, "I'm not going to make it! I'm not going to make it!" He jokingly said back to her, "You are going to make it; you are going to make it!" She stuck her head out of the trunk and said, "What do you know, fella?"

Then he went into the store to get a few items and went to the "Under ten items line. There were twenty people in the ten item

check out line ahead of him. And he began to wonder if he was going to make it!

We, like that woman in the parking lot, like the teen wanting a gift for his birthday, are always working hard trying to experience joy for ourselves and others. We continually ask ourselves: Are we going to make it? Or do we get tired, discouraged and frustrated not finding joy in our lives. We often turn to all kinds of dead end addictions in search of joy.

Yet finding long lasting joy is not a question of pursuit but of surrender to the one who is always and everywhere present and who alone who can bring joy to our hearts.

That's why the angels come to meet these shepherds. Remember: in the heavy pursuit of joy, the shepherds, like us, are just everyday people doing the best they can. The arrival of the angels invites them to stop and surrender to someone greater than they are.

- Note the shepherds' first response to angels, the messengers of God: It is one of fear.
 - Scripture said they were terrified.

- Both Mary and the shepherds are invited to let go, surrender, to the Good News.
- But then the angel said to the shepherds, “Do not fear, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people!
 - And what is the good news? You will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes: In Jesus day, a loved child would be washed clean after birth, rubbed in salt, and then carefully wrapped in swaddling strips of clothes.
 - And the angels go on, “He will be lying in a manger. A manger is where animals come to feed their hungers. Yes, this child will feed his people with the joy that all our hustling in the world cannot provide.

Experiences of surrender, these moments of deep awareness of realizing that God is with us and will feed our deepest hungers and bring joy to our hearts may last just for a short moment, but can burn in our hearts and endure for a lifetime.

My brothers and sisters, as we gather this evening (morning), we are just everyday people doing the best we can. We hustle every day searching for joy. I encourage you in this Christmas season, take some

time to surrender to God in prayer. Let the angels, the messengers of God, speak to your heart. God wishes to speak to you. "I have great news which will bring lasting joy to all the people."

If we become aware of the God who is always present,
If we like Mary and the shepherds surrender and listen to the good news God has for us,

Then we will become pregnant with a joy, a kind of joy which no one can take from us.

I come to announce to you Good News.

Today in the City of Detroit is born a savior FOR YOU, if you only open your heart and surrender.

FOOTNOTE: Key ideas for this homily came from John Shea's, The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers, Feasts, Funerals, and Weddings.