

*Midnight Mass – 2009*

*Homily*

We have a God who simply will not take “no” for an answer!

That, I propose to you, dear friends and neighbors, is one of the central messages of Christmas: We have a God who simply will not take “no” for an answer!

Think about it:

It started in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had everything, every gift, all happiness, intimacy with God, eternal life, no woe, war, or sickness -- and they told God *no* as they disobeyed His only request. God could have legitimately responded, “Go to hell!” Not our God! We have a God who simply will not take *no* for an answer! So He offered us mercy, salvation, happiness, and eternal life – and we said, *no!*

He saw a world destroying itself by sin and selfishness, and sent a flood to cleanse it . . . but, the world once again said *no!*

He made a covenant with Abraham, and bound Himself by a covenant with His people . . . but we once again were unfaithful and told Him *no!*

He saw His people enslaved, so He sent Moses, Aaron and Joshua to lead them miraculously to freedom . . . but all replied *no!*

He gave us commandments, and we worshipped molten images;

He sent David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel to teach us and call us back to Him, and we said *no!*

The good news tonight, my friends, is that we have a Good God who simply will not take *no* for an answer!

So, how is this lavishly loving and merciful God ever going to coax us to say *yes* instead of *no*?

How is this prodigal Father going to transform us, convert us?

Nothing changes people more than . . . a *baby!*

Nothing changes lives more than . . . a *baby!*

Nothing upsets routine more . . . nothing opens hearts more . . . nothing transforms a *no!* to a *yes!* more than . . . a *baby!*

And so God our Father sent His only Son as a *baby* . . . and that's what this holy, silent night is all about.

And now the choice is ours: as we behold that Holy Infant, will we say *yes* or *no*?

As a young priest over thirty years ago I had the privilege of preparing a wonderful young couple for the sacrament of marriage. They were so very different; their families were so dramatically opposite:

She came from a prominent, wealthy background, he from a poor, country one;

She had a Masters degree in education, he had barely gotten out of high school;

She was already a principal at a prestigious school,

he was a plumber;

She drove a T-Bird convertible,

he a beat-up Dodge pickup.

But they were head-over-heels, hopelessly in love with each other.

One big problem: their folks detested each other ...

Major heartache for them, haunting an otherwise happy engagement ...

The night of the rehearsal dinner, the two sets of parents got into a shouting match, reducing the bride-to-be-to-tears.

They shot lasers at each other during the wedding, and they should have worn flack-jackets instead of tuxedos and gowns at the reception.

Sad ... ugly ... so selfish and petty ...

Well, anyway, about a year later, I get a call from the couple with good news! They had a new baby boy, and wanted me to do the baptism! "I'd be honored," I reply. And then I popped the question, "Oh, by the way, how are the Hatfields and McCoys?"

"As bad as ever," came the answer.

So, off I go, a few Sundays later, to their parish church. Sure enough, there are the two sets of grandparents staring at each other like Yankee and Red Sox fans. They invite me over to their new house after the Christening, and I accept, although I'm dreading it ...

Well, I couldn't believe it! As I walk into the house, there are both pair of grandparents, on the floor, cooing at the new baby! They're laughing, the four of them, teasing about which side of the family the new baby favors, passing the little infant one to another, one more radiant than the other.

I sneak into the kitchen and the new parents whisper, "Isn't it a miracle! This is the first time the four of them have been together with the new baby, and you'd think they were life-long friends! We can't believe the transformation!"

That baby changed a hateful *no* to a radiant *yes* ; that infant transformed lives from bitterness to graciousness, from hate to love, from resentment to forgiveness.

Babies have a way of doing that ... No wonder God entered the world as one ...

So, folks, what's it going to be Christmas 2009. Look at the baby in the crib; will we pick Him up, hug Him, accept Him into our lives, love Him so much that we want to spend eternity with Him? Will we let this baby transform sin to grace, darkness to light, selfishness to love, despair to hope, doubt to faith, ambivalence to meaning, death to life?

Will it be a *yes* or a *no*?

Just remember. Whatever we answer, Christmas means we have a God who simply will not take *no* for an answer.