

The Master of the Order's homily on Christmas Eve

Dear brothers and sisters,

This night is the night of the greatest mystery. "A child is given to us, whom you will find wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." This is given to us as a sign. How can such an ordinary reality of a new-born baby, how can such a fragile sign of a child who depends for everything on those who welcome him, how can this be the news of salvation that has been expected for centuries?

On this night, precisely, it is the coming of this child "begging" for hospitality from humankind that becomes the holy dawn, the dawn that, with all its weaknesses, will overcome the darkness of the night. This little beggar, this child of dawn, he is the sign that is given to us in order to recognize, wait for and welcome the new world that God, through Him, wants to bring on earth. Brothers and sisters, this is the profession of faith that we carry in our hearts, that can fill us with emotion on Christmas night.

Like the shepherds, the news of this holy dawn reaches us in the middle of our normal daily activities. They are on the mountains, and it is night. Their job is to watch over the flock entrusted to them, and which probably does not belong to them. It is there, in the middle of their human life, that the angels come. Suddenly, when they hear the news, their hearts awaken. From the shepherds' example we can keep for ourselves two important points. First, even though we have things to do, day after day, and we have responsibilities to carry out and they are important, nothing should extinguish the Word of the promise from the depths of our heart. If the shepherds had simply forgotten this promise, how could they have taken the angels seriously? Let us have our heart ready to be awakened, in such a way that the promise of a new world given to us by God could mobilize our hope. Then there is a second aspect of the attitude of the shepherds that should guide us through life in our days. The Word that God speaks to them is strange: a child has been born, a sign has been given, whom you will find down there, in a manger. This notwithstanding, the trust is complete: they get up and do what the angels told them. The beginning of hope comes when we welcome with trust the fact that God speaks to us, that through this Word addressed to us, He already wants to make us his friends. By this dialogue which he started on his own initiative, we should have our heart awakened to this incredible desire on God's part to come personally to us, to speak to us, to dialogue with us in the heart of our ordinary life.

Then the shepherds set out towards the manger that was pointed to them by the angels. Note that they start walking when it was still night and that, therefore, they dared to go forward. Surely they recalled the verse we have just heard again: the people who walked ... The shepherds walk towards the child, and it is as if they take with them all those men and women who, like them, try to advance without yet seeing the rising dawn. How numerous are those we surely recall on this Christmas night, who are still crushed by the yoke, on whose shoulders they still carry burdens that are too heavy to carry, who are still refused their human dignity, and who no longer dare to hope. Tonight, I remember many realities of which our brothers and our sisters throughout the world are unfortunately witnesses, and in which they show solidarity. Tonight, together with the shepherds walking the still dark paths that lead to the holy manger, we carry with us the children of the Saint Martin de Porres homes in Latvia and in the Ukraine who barely have a roof where to rest, and very little support for them just to learn the ways of humanity. We carry with us the street children of many and many countries, from Haiti to Manila, of whom our brothers or our sisters are protectors, and they stay by their side so that they would be respected and loved. Again, tonight, whole countries walk with us, for the dictators' boots have not yet relaxed, and corruption and political abuse of power still run

the streets of this world. Yes, all of them are here with us, following the shepherds who go forward with confidence. Down there, in the holy manger, the sign given to us by God that a new world shall be born, that dawn is going to rise, that night shall be overcome, is waiting for us.

And we arrive there. Oh, the place is surely very miserable: a fragile shelter, even because there is no place for them in the main inn. There is barely enough warmth. In short, our little beggar is in fact received, but as if reluctantly, halfheartedly. He is put with other people who do not have any place themselves. He is already ranked with those who count so little for the world's powerful people. He comes from far. He is like a little nomad whose name is barely known. My brothers and sisters, it was not enough for God to take on himself our humanity. He also had to carry the weight of human precariousness when it is threatened with abandonment, exclusion and rejection. When it is obliged to show that it has the same right as anybody else to be welcomed and to have its place in the dialogue of all humanity. There the dawn of our salvation starts to rise: a new world is given to us, through this little mendicant nomad, who forces the door of humanity and lets into the company of all, those who, like him, are so easily excluded. However, from this infant lying in his makeshift crib comes forth a mysterious force that seems to draw love from those around him. Mary is there, and then Joseph who simply accepted the promise and the message of God with such faith and equal confidence, as did the shepherds in due time. They accepted that God adopts the love that bound them together, and to draw from him the strength to make it possible for this love to teach humanity to the Son of God. Yes, brothers and sisters, here the holy dawn of our salvation makes itself even more intense: God gives his son to the world as a beggar so that humanity could teach him to live a human life. He adopted humanity. He made himself "capable of humanity" in order to reveal to humans that they themselves are "capable of God". It is a marvelous and mysterious exchange made possible through the adoption by God of the love in the middle of which Jesus was born. This adoption of the love of which humans are capable is our salvation. On being born in its midst, the Son of God reveals to humans from where to draw the strength to join him so that with him they could bring the dawns that overcome the nights.

Where can we get this strength from? From the love that, in this holy night, watches over the child in the manger. In the fragility and sweetness of this little nomad God who begs hospitality and, on receiving it, carries with him all those who, until then, had been rejected. It comes from the trust that God has in the ability of human beings to let their own human life be inhabited by the Breath of His Life. A child is born for us; a Son is given to us, and through him tonight we see the dawn of our lives.