**CHRISTMAS HOMILY**

READINGS: Isaiah 52:7-10/ Heb. 1:1-6/ John 1:1-18

THEME: **CHRISTMAS – THE FEAST OF GIFTS**

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**Christmas is a feast of gifts**: God has given us the most precious gift in his only Son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem; and we, in turn, in appreciation to and in emulation of him, give gifts to others.

Beloved, try to recall a great gift you once received. How did you feel on that day? Probably you felt you were on top of the world. Now could you remember a day you felt very disappointed because someone gave you a gift that did not meet your expectation? Gifts are often given to express love, thoughtfulness and well-wishing. However, the recipient may or may not be pleased with a gift depending on his/her disposition, expectations and circumstances.

There is a story about a man (Kofi), who every Christmas gave gifts of progressively higher values to his wife (Ama). For the first year after their holy matrimony, Kofi gave a wrist watch to Ama; she received it with joy. The following year, Kofi gave Ama an expensive mobile phone; she was likewise pleased with the gift. On the occasion of their third Christmas, Ama was given an expensive jewelry; and she was very pleased. For their fourth Christmas, Kofi placed in a big box the key of a new car he had purchased for Ama. When she received the box, she wondered why it was so light, but when she opened it, she was exceedingly surprised by the car key she saw with the accompanying note: ‘Go to Silver Star Company for your new Benz car.’ Ama’s excitement knew no bounds; you could imagine how she expressed special gratitude to and deeper love for Kofi.

The following Christmas, it took Kofi a great deal of thinking and praying to settle on what greater gift to give to his wife. He finally thought: ‘I have given her a lot of material gifts, so I have to give her something spiritual this Christmas.’ Hence, he decided to give her what, he believed, is the greatest gift: Jesus Christ. He took a box, bigger than the previous year’s; and he placed in it a beautiful life-size picture of the infant Jesus, with a note, which read: ‘Ama, behold the greatest gift. May Christ, whose birthday we celebrate, fill your heart and mine with exceeding joy, and make us united in love and prosperous for the rest of our lives, crowning it all with eternal life!’ The expected ‘Amen’ from Ama never followed.

Meanwhile, Ama, from the first commercial adverts on the season of Christmas, had been wondering about what special gift (greater than the Benz car) Kofi would give her. Now, when she opened the big box and she saw its contents Ama was terribly disappointed. Spontaneously throwing the picture at Kofi, she said: ‘What do you mean? Are you serious? Did I marry Jesus or you?’ Thus, the good intention of Kofi and the unmet ‘higher’ expectation of Ama began the woes in their marriage.

Like Kofi, God gave mankind gifts of progressively higher values, culminating in the gift of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb.1:1-6, our second reading). What God has given us is his greatest gift, because Jesus Christ is the only Son of God (John 3:16) and Jesus himself is truly God (John 1:1, 14, the gospel reading). Secondly, it was out of love that God gave us the gift of his only Son (John 3:16). Unfortunately, many of us, like Ama, do not appreciate this most precious gift of God, nor do we appreciate the depth of the love God has shown us through this gift. Today’s gospel reading expresses an aspect of mankind’s ingratitude for God’s gift as follows: Jesus ‘was already in the world and through him the world was made, **the very world that did not know him**. He came to his own, **yet his own people did not receive him**’ (John1:10-11).

Beloved, unlike Ama who threw away the picture of Jesus, let us not throw away Jesus from our lives. Rather, like Kofi, let us whole-heartedly accept God’s greatest gift, Jesus, THE VERY REASON FOR THIS SEASON. Secondly, let us constantly show our gratitude to God by these and other ways:

* A prayerful life of constant gratitude to God for the most lovely gift of his Son;
* Joining the faithful of God in **regular** worship [this is a reminder to those who are Christmas-Easter church-goers];
* Being ourselves GIFTS to others and the larger societies; and
* Giving generously to friends and the needy in this season of Christmas and beyond.

I wish you all, A MERRY CHRISTMAS and A HAPPY NEW YEAR!