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Christmas message

Holy Year can help the faithful reflect on Jesus as

By Archbishop William D. Borders

A wise person once observed: "Youth is when we wonder if our watch is fast; old age is when we wonder if perhaps our calendar is!"

A few weeks ago we came to the end of the Church's liturgical calendar, and now with Christmas upon us and the end of the secular calendar year, it seems appropriate to reflect on time, and how, in this Holy Year, Christ can be and should be the center of time in our faith community, reconciling everything to himself.

Time has a relentless quality to it. It goes on, even if we do not happen to go on with it. Time is lord of us in ways in which we are accustomed to think of God. Time existed before any of us were in this life. It will exist after all of us are no more in this life.

A Holy Year, however, such as the Holy Year of Redemption we are now celebrating, enables us to know that time in relation with the redemption of Christ has a dominion of its own. As St. Paul said of Christ in his letter to the Colossians: "He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being."

The Holy Year continued past the end of the liturgical year and will continue past the end of this calendar year. This Holy Year cuts across Church calendars and secular calendars to let us know symbolically that all time and all years are holy.

In celebrating the feast of the Nativity, we are again making a statement about time. If the eternal God who became flesh in time is not enthroned in our own hearts as king of our lives, our lives will lack meaning. If God is not enthroned in the world as king of the world, then all years will lack hope.

As we think of Jesus, then, as king of our hearts and king of time, we must focus on the reality that in Luke's Gospel, the Son of God was born in poverty, in an occupied country. He spent his life preaching the good news of salvation, helping those who needed help, even working miracles for the sake of others.

In my opinion, the greatest miracle that Jesus worked was the one he did not work. He did not save himself. Instead he saved us.

An important aspect of that miracle was letting us know that taking away pain was ultimately not as important as sharing pain. The word compassion comes from two Latin words meaning: "to suffer

with." As king of our individual lives and as king of our world, the eternal message of Jesus is that God believed we were worth suffering with.

No matter what cross in life we may ever find ourselves hanging on, we know that we will not look up to heaven to see God reclining on his throne. Instead we look to our side to see God hanging with us, just as the Good Thief did who died beside Jesus.

That's a good notion to consider at Christmas time. It's also a good theme to begin a new year with next week when we will open a new chapter of our lives.

For the past few weeks we have been celebrating the season of Advent, a time when we reflect on how the people of the world are awaiting for God to come to be with them. May I ask the question: are we waiting expectantly for God to be with us?

Sadly we recognize that our world probably is not. Our culture tells us that the way to happiness, to greatness, is through power, wealth, influence and defense against the attacks of the enemy.

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount that happiness and greatness come through poverty of spirit, mercy, justice, openness to one another, mutual vulnerability, rather than defense.

If one is to share in and experience the reality of this happiness, he or she must accept, appreciate, and make judgments through the personal acceptance of the values of Christ our Redeemer that rise above the self-centered appeals of a materialistic world. This is only possible within an on-going lived relationship with God. This relationship enables a person to go beyond the limited, the particular, or even the spiritual, goods of this life.

The Holy Year of Redemption brings home to us that redemption is constant in life and that people of each generation live within the love of Christ, and through that love are bonded in community. The fruits of the Holy Year will continue past this and every calendar year until we complete our pilgrim journey through time to eternity. Since we are fallible, vulnerable, and mortal, we will experience suffering and death.

Yet we are people of hope, because the incarnate Word of God has conquered death in His resurrection. In union with Him we know that we also will conquer

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death and rise with Him to immortality.

This Holy Year called by Pope John Paul on the 1950th anniversary of the Resurrection will not end until next Easter. In a sense, the Holy Year reconciles two years: the liturgical year and the calendar year, to let us know that reconciliation is the heart of all years.

My Christmas message to you is that God believed we were worth suffering with, and the purpose of the Holy Year is for us to allow God to convince us that all of us are worth living with.

Therefore, we must reach out to each other with concern and compassion. Compassion leads to reconciliation. Therefore, if this Holy Year is to be more than a pious exercise, then we must use this time to begin to reconcile.

To help that process, I would like to close these reflections with ten principles of cooperation that can be useful for every family, for any group, any committee, any organization, and, ultimately, any nation. My belief in sharing these principles is that the gift of compassion leads to cooperation, and cooperation leads to reconciliation.

• The first principle is that of generosity. Generosity flows from the union of human and Divine love which makes us our best selves. Give yourself to other people, to your causes and to your dreams. Don't wait for someone else to notice you, but trust in the God who sees in secret.

• A second principle of cooperation is that we can be different without being bad, and we are different and we are not bad. Each of us is a unique person.

• Third, our differences help to complete us and complete life. The organization man needs the creativity of the artist, and the artist needs the discipline of the manager. Together they reflect the creative love of God.

• Fourth, don't be afraid of conflict. There is no evidence that any group of human beings ever interacted together for any period of time without conflict. The challenge of different opinions, different goods, enables us to look at the total reality of life.

• Fifth, what Christianity is meant to do is support each of us in an on-going conversion and to help others to manage their conflict and to reconcile after the

conflict. We should openly admit personal mistakes and wrongs, and be forgiving and even forgetful of the injustices of others. Mistakes that we recognize help us to grow.

• Sixth, don't judge other people. What a political servant in his better moments said long ago is true. "If we could look into the heart of our worst enemy and see all the hurt and pain there, we would reduce to tears."

• Seventh, don't be afraid to ask for help. Asking someone else for help always affirms them. It makes someone else feel good to know that we think they are competent and willing to reach out unselfishly.

• An eighth basic principle for cooperation among people is to realize that while we cannot cast out all the devils in any given situation, we can still affirm the good that is there. The poet Goethe once said: "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

• A ninth principle of cooperation is to try to fit your picture into the larger picture. A piece of the puzzle is not all of the puzzle, although it may at times seem that way to us. Every person is a valued part of the mosaic of God's creation.

• Finally, if in doubt, think the best of others. Fear, suspicion, distrust, and so on do more to sabotage relationships and cooperation than anything else. Love, trust, and acceptance bring out the best that others are capable of being.

These are just a few basic principles inherent in the Gospel of Christ. They are suggestions of ways that we might learn to act at the end of this year, the beginning of next year, with both years bound together by the Holy Year.

On this feast of Christmas, it is time to declare Him Lord of our lives and Lord of time.

Ultimately, none of us has forever to learn the art of reconciliation. All of us will have forever to regret our failures of reconciliation. Let's decide today to be agents of reconciliation. This Holy Year is the appropriate time. St. Paul says "now is the acceptable time." We may have no other time.

May God strengthen us and bless us all on this Christmas Day and throughout the New Year.