

Some assembly required



It is pure delight to watch young children as they receive their presents on Christmas morning. Full of anticipation, they rip through any wrapping to get at the gift they have long awaited.

Sometimes they can make use of the present without delay. At other times, the gift is accompanied by the words: "some assembly required." The gift is fully given, yet it requires engagement on the part of the recipient (and usually also Mom or Dad) for its full realization.

The child is usually impatient to get working at it, and, eager to make full use of the gift, will not rest until the assembly is complete.

This analogy can help us appreciate the gift we have been given at the birth of Jesus Christ, and the challenge that it places before us.

This gift, long anticipated and earnestly sought, is peace.

As Christ was born of Mary, the angels announced "peace on earth." This gift of peace is fully given in Christ, yet there is "some assembly required," i.e., the gift calls forth from us deep personal engagement for it to be fully realized.



The profound and beautiful texts of Sacred Scripture proclaimed at the solemn Christmas Mass of Midnight teach us why Jesus Christ is our peace.

He is announced by the angels as “Saviour,” which in the Bible means the one who will free us from the disease of sin by the balm of mercy.

Precisely because Jesus forgives our sins, he is what Isaiah calls the light that dispels the darkness blinding our minds and hearts, the One who breaks the yoke of oppression and injustice.

Sin shatters; love unites.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who breaks into human history with the love of God that destroys sin and thus restores people to unity with God and with one another. Jesus, and only Jesus, is our peace. In him, the long-anticipated gift is fully given.

Yet, there remains some assembly required; the gift of peace becomes real in our lives only when we invest ourselves fully in its realization.

Here again, Sacred Scripture is instructive. It reveals a simple, yet very challenging, two-step assembly process.

When the shepherds heard the message of the angels, they went quickly to find Mary, Joseph and the newborn child. The astonishing message was of such importance that they had to see and experience it for themselves.

This teaches us that Jesus Christ came to be encountered personally by everyone

who hears the message.

Here is step number one in the assembly of the gift: turning to Christ so that we each come to know personally the joy of a life-transforming relationship with him.

Step two is provided by St. Paul in his letter to Titus.

Not only must we hasten to encounter Christ as did the shepherds, but also we need to receive and heed his teaching.

In Jesus Christ, Paul says, God's grace has appeared, "bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly..."

Step two in the full realization of the gift of peace is to do what Jesus commands.

To receive him as God means necessarily accepting his teaching. Only his words lead us to peace.

Here, though, we encounter a very strong temptation.

The teaching of Christ calls us to repentance, to change, to give up all patterns of thought or behaviour that contradict it. There is no other way to peace.

Yet, we instinctively resist such change, and from this resistance arises the temptation is to put up the sign, "No room in the inn."

Sadly, we see this all around us and within us. Our contemporary "inns" of political strategy, scientific research, economic policy, and philosophical anthropology all remain closed to his revelation.

Even in our homes and our hearts we are experiencing a growing tendency to close out Christ and his teaching by the adoption of a cultural mindset distant from the Gospel. By making no room for our Lord and his instruction, we avoid step two, and the peace for which we long, the peace fully given in the birth of Christ, remains unrealized in us.



So, we know what we need to do for the full realization of the gift of peace: turn to Christ and accept in humble obedience and trust all that he asks of us.

It is possible to do this.

Aware of our weakness and tendency to sin we may be tempted to despair of our inability to follow Christ.

Well, in spite of our weakness, it is possible because Christ makes it possible. He who was born of Mary in Bethlehem, he who gave his life on the Cross and rose from the dead, he who is our peace, makes himself present to us in the gift of the Eucharist.

The Lord we receive in the Eucharist is the same Jesus born of Mary. He continues to come to us so that, by the gift of his grace, we can turn to him and follow his teaching.

In other words, he not only shows us the assembly required to realize the gift of peace but also walks with us and enables us to do the assembling.

No wonder the angels gave their announcement to the shepherds as good news of great joy! Joy springs from the realization of true peace.

This gift is fully given in the child born of Mary. With Christ and in Christ, let us assemble it as a reality in our day by turning to him and doing what he asks

Like the children eager to put their gifts together, let's not rest until the

assembly of Christ's gift to us is complete.