

A Christmas Letter
Sts. Simon & Jude Parish
Huntington Beach, CA
By Friar Dan Barica

Dear parishioners, visitors and extended SSJ community members,

A warm and joy-filled greeting to all of you in these last days before the celebration of our Lord's Nativity.

I know that I am a true, dyed-in-the-wool Franciscan when I feel the excitement growing in my heart as I contemplate the awesome wonder of God becoming a human being and entering our world for the sake of love. That mystery alone led St. Francis (and his followers) to experience an unquenchable joy and the deepest expressions of gratitude. But God pushes the love factor exponentially as we consider his manner of entering the world: quietly, unpretentiously, and humbly lacking every possible privilege due him as our Lord and Savior. The fact that God takes as his first earthly throne a trough meant to feed animals and then welcomes shepherds as his first guests - these important details of the Christmas story brought St. Francis to ecstatic rapture and likewise, his followers. Francis never lost sight of the humility of God and the Franciscan family has clung to that notion over the centuries, becoming the theological basis for Franciscan works of hospitality, mercy and outreach to the marginalized up to today. Only pure, divine love could have schemed such a plan. And our hope for a better world lies in Christians that prayerfully immerse themselves into this aspect of God, forming them into agents of God's peace, mercy, hospitality and love.

Let us celebrate together this wonder of wonders and share our joy in heartfelt prayer and exuberant song during the Christmas liturgies.

Christmas liturgies always attract many to our parish: family members who bring loved ones and other visitors from out of town, parishioners who do not regularly attend, and others who may have been away for a long time. It is our desire that everyone have a deep and Christ-centered experience. That said, it can also become quite chaotic. Keep in mind that because the 4:00 p.m. Christmas Vigil Masses in the church and in Colman Hall are a popular option, they are also the most crowded. Parking and seating will quickly reach capacity. We also do not allow saving seats so we ask families to enter together. Doors will open at 3:30 p.m. and as soon as the church is filled the liturgy will begin, sometimes as early as 3:45 p.m.! Those who do not get into the church will be asked to try for a seat at Colman Hall. We must honor the law with regard to crowd capacity regulations, so please be cooperative with ushers and other liturgical ministers. Each year conflicts arise over seating and we want to do our best to avoid any conflict. For those desiring a more peaceful experience of gathering and worship, I highly recommend attending any of the other Christmas Masses.

May we always be mindful of the true meaning of Christmas: God's love that expresses itself by humbly forsaking privilege in order to find intimate communion with His beloved

children - every human being. For His sake and inspired by His example, let us be willing to make room for others, perhaps even offering our place at liturgy so that another might have a better place.

Finally, allow me to leave you with the wonderful story of the first, staged Nativity that St. Francis initiated at the village of Greccio during the night of Christmas, three years before his death. I hope it inspires you to more fully embrace the mystery of the Incarnation. And I hope that the joy of this ongoing event reaches into the depths of your heart in a transformative way.

For a beautiful telling of the Greccio story by Franciscan Friar, Murray Bodo, click [here](#).

Peace, blessings, and Christmas joy to you and your loved ones,
Fr. Daniel Barica, ofm, Pastor