

Besides *A Christmas Story*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, and *Home Alone*, my favorite Christmas movie is Frank Capra's 1946 classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart. As many would rightfully declare, this film is truly one of the greatest *films* of all time. If you've never seen this movie, I strongly encourage you to watch it. It is a *must-see* American classic.

*It's a Wonderful Life* is the beautiful story of a human life—and more specifically, it's about a man named George Bailey, who's played masterfully by Jimmy Stewart. At his core, George is a good, kind, and generous man with a big heart for others. He's a man who has great dreams and goals to travel the world and become a successful engineer. Throughout the story, George's life is dealt many setbacks for various reasons and so George repeatedly finds himself sacrificing his dreams and goals for the sake of others and *their* well-being.

Without ruining the movie for those who haven't seen it, towards the end, George finds himself in an extremely serious crisis that causes him to despair. In one of the most powerful scenes of the movie, George, feeling utterly defeated and sitting at a bar drinking away his

pain, sincerely and quietly prays to God out of desperation, with tears welling up in his eyes: “God! Oh God! Dear Father in Heaven! I’m not a praying man but, if You’re up there and you can hear me, show me the way! I’m at the end of my rope! Show me the way, oh God!” In a certain sense, George Bailey represents the human race, crying out to God in our need, desperately seeking a way out from our suffering, our darkness, our sinfulness, and our fears.

Brothers and sisters, tonight/today we’re here to celebrate the birth of the Way. Tonight/today we’re celebrating the birth of a little baby Who not only shows us *the way through our own* darkness and suffering, but *is Himself the Way* through all of the evil in the world. This precious child was born to give us freedom and liberate us from the destructive slavery of sin. This baby was born to conquer evil and so at the mere sound of His name, all the powers of Hell tremble in great fear.

There is *absolutely no sin, evil, crime, scandal, or virus either* in the past, present, or future that *could ever overpower this baby and undermine His Eternal supremacy and Kingship!* Omicron has *nothing* on this baby, Who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning

and the End! Simply put, this defenseless, little baby is our eternal hope and salvation!

Brothers and sisters, this newborn baby is named Jesus and He *is the Way, the Truth, and the Life! He is the Light of the World, the King of the Universe, and the victorious Savior of the human race!*

This child, born in Bethlehem in Roman Palestine almost 2,000 years ago, is the Son of the living God and He invites *each of us by name* to give our entire life *to Him* and to enjoy an intimate relationship with Him *in and through* His universal Church, which *He established* to unite us around Himself.

I honestly don't care how often you hear this or how lame it might sound—it's the eternal Christmas Truth that deserves to be repeated every year and shouted from every pulpit: Our Lord Jesus Christ *is the Reason for the season* and *He is the greatest Gift we could ever receive!* What greater gift could God give to us than the *gift of Himself?*—He who is infinite and perfect Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Life, Love, Mercy, and Peace? All of the gifts under our Christmas trees *pale* in comparison to Christ our Savior, the Son of the Living God!

Brothers and sisters, gift-giving is an awesome Christmas tradition, but realistically, there is *no* gift under our tree at home that is going to perfectly satisfy us forever! They may bring us some temporary joy and comfort, but next year, we're going to ask for *more* gifts, new and different gifts. When it comes to material possessions, we're *always wanting more* and this is indicative of our natural, constant search for perfect happiness and love. It takes a lot of denial and self-delusion to repress our natural human desire for perfect happiness and love.

Such a universal, innate human desire is evidence of the fact that we are created for God and we will not be truly happy or satisfied until we find Him and allow Him to love us. *There is no gift under the tree that can give us what Christ alone can give us, and that is eternal happiness, love, and salvation.* And so ironically, while *we* are searching for satisfaction of our deepest human desires, *God* is actively searching for *us*, seeking to satisfy our deepest human desires!

And so in the epic saga of salvation history, Christmas marks a monumental phase in the greatest search and rescue mission ever! *God became one of us in order to rescue us!* He seeks to rescue us from our

sins, our fears and doubts, our suffering, and our despair! And so Christmas is about God taking the divine initiative to go in search of us! God *always* takes the initiative to search for us when we go astray. He searches for us with an intense and passionate love—an unconditional love that a Father has for His children! Christmas is a reminder that God seeks us, always inviting us to open our hearts and minds to Him. He loves us more than we love ourselves! And He desires our happiness, freedom, and salvation *more* than we desire it! All He seeks from us is an open heart that is willing to receive Him.

Christmas is a joyful celebration of the Incarnation, the *historical fact* that God became man for our salvation! God did not come to us as an App! He did not appear to us through FaceTime, TikTok, or a Zoom Call! No, God took on our human flesh! And so Christmas is a celebration of God’s loving closeness to each of us. While “distance” is a prominent word in the context of the ongoing pandemic, *Christmas reminds us that God does not keep His distance from us, but rather that He is so close to us*. Indeed, Jesus’ name is *Emmanuel*, which is Hebrew for “God-with-us.” And so *in Jesus*, God is *truly with us and*

*one of us and therefore, we must rejoice at His saving presence among us!* It is *through* the Christmas Babe that we are freely given the divine life of the Trinity, a life defined by eternal, unconditional, and perfect Love—the *same* love that we seek with every fiber of our being.

In order to continually receive this divine life and all that our Savior wants to give us and do for us, we must stay close to Him through prayer and the sacraments, *especially* the Most Holy Eucharist, which is *the greatest visible gift on earth precisely because* it is *Jesus Himself*: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

Returning to Frank Capra's classic film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, towards the climax of the film, George Bailey prays desperately again with tears in his eyes: "I want to live again! I want to live again! I want to live again! Please God, let me live again!" Brothers and sisters, Christmas is the celebration of new life in Christ, *Who is Life Itself!* Our Lord Jesus came so that *we might have life and have it to the full.* Christ was born so that we could be *reborn* in Him! Not only did the Son of God come to give us life, but as Love incarnate, *He is the*

*meaning* of life itself, and so *in Him*, we discover our true identity and what it means to be fully and authentically human.

I'd like to close with the words of Pope Benedict XVI, who said: "God has done everything; he has done the impossible: he was made flesh. His all-powerful love has accomplished something which surpasses all human understanding: the Infinite has become a child, has entered the human family. And yet, *this same God cannot enter my heart unless I open the door to him.*"

As we prepare to worship and receive this precious baby named Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us ask our Savior, Who is the Light of the World, to dispel the darkness in our lives and give us the grace to open the door of our heart to Him. Then *and only then* will He be able to save us and give us the life, the happiness, the peace, the freedom, and the love that we seek.