CHRISTMAS HOMILY

2018

The Church officially instituted the Feast of Christmas <u>early to mid-4th century</u> after the edict of Constantine in 313 AD which pledged freedom for the Catholic religion. The 25th of December date was fixed by the Church in 336 AD – that was the first public celebration of Christmas.

In ancient times, before the arrival of Christianity, pagan Rome celebrated a yearly event on 25th December known as 'the festival of the Invincible Sun.' According to their calculations this was the time of the Winter Solstice - the Sun appeared at its weakest but after that date it began to recover. Hence the name, 'invincible sun'.

As in other instances, the Catholic Church infused this Festival with a Christian significance - Christ is the invincible Son of God who by His coming into this world has dispelled the darkness of sin and death. St Augustine puts it like this:

'We would have suffered eternal death, had Christ not been born in time. We would have been lost if he had not hastened to our aid. We would have perished, had he not come'. I tell you again: for our sake, God became man'. (St Augustine). God became man so that mankind should share forever in the life of God. That is our destiny by virtue of the birth of our Saviour.

The most powerful man in the world at the time of Christ's birth was Caesar Augustus and during his watch, which incidentally went on for about 40 years, the Empire experienced a long period of peace known as the Pax Romana. Rome commemorated this by erecting a great peace monument, part of which is still there to this day. But, unlike Caesar, with all his pomp, the heavenly Prince of Peace, came into the world practically unnoticed and in a very unassuming way.

It is also ironic that the Saviour of the human race, would eventually be disowned by the official Judaism of His day. St John in the Gospel says: "He came to his own people but they did not accept him but to all who did accept Him he gave power to become children of God". The Holy Family being turned away at the Bethlehem Inn in a sense foreshadowed what was to happen to Him in the lead-up to His sacred Passion.

The angels introduced Him to the shepherds as the world's saviour. Scripture says: 'God sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved'. But He leaves us free to respond to His invitation or not.

And perhaps therein lies <u>a pertinent message for us all</u> today. The last Pope says that Christ was born in a stable in order to humble human pride. We put Christ at the centre of our Christmas when we are humble enough to accept His message and live by it. Then the light of the invincible Son of God will shine on us too both here and hereafter.

A peaceful and blessed Christmas to you all.