

**Advent Mass with Inmates
December 18, 2019**

My brothers, we see in the Gospel the amazing story of Gabriel coming to St. Joseph in a dream. He came to proclaim Mary's pregnancy by the Holy Spirit and the coming of the Lord Jesus. It is a truly amazing story, but I think sometimes we do not take the time to put ourselves in Joseph's shoes. This woman that he loved was pregnant, and it was not his baby. He was confused, and he must have been disappointed. Mary had told him what happened, but it must have been so overwhelming. Mary could have been outcast or even killed in those days if people found out. Joseph had no peace and he was afraid. So when the angel came to Joseph, he brought a great gift. He brought the gift of peace.

Gabriel told Joseph, "Do not be afraid." This is common proclamation by God and his angels. "Do not be afraid." It is just as important a message for us today as it was for Joseph back then. The angel reminded St. Joseph of very meaning of the name Emmanuel: "God is with us." This is why Joseph could be at peace. He was to take Mary into his home, and he was to welcome God into his household – "God with us." This is the reason we should be at peace as well. The Lord has made his dwelling among us. We are in this special season of welcoming Christ into our hearts once more by the power of the Holy Spirit. We do not need to be afraid. No matter the circumstance, no matter the struggle, no matter our mistakes in the past. The Lord has made his home with us, and we can be at peace. And, we have been called to share that peace with others.

Pope Francis spoke to a group of prisoners on Holy Thursday two years ago. He told them: “It is easy to be at peace with those we love and with those who do good for us; but it is not easy to be at peace with those who have wronged us, who do not love us... Ask the Lord, in silence, for the grace to give everyone, good and bad, the gift of peace.” Just like Gabriel did all those years ago, we are called to give the gift of peace to others who have none or who are scared. No matter who they are, they deserve to hear the Good News! Even here in this place you have this calling. You know better than I do how difficult life in here can be. You know the pain of separation from the ones you love. You know the burden of regrets and painful memories. But you are here as missionaries of hope and missionaries of peace. Think about who you can help with your witness and your presence. Think of how God is calling you to give the gift of peace to others. Ask the Lord to show you how you can share this gift here in this place and in this time. Do not be afraid.

My brothers, please know how much we in the Church love you. This is why we always have this Mass here every year. Never forget that we love you and that you are not alone. Thank you for the gift of your faith, keep your hearts open to the transforming love of God and follow his ways. May God bless us all and keep us unified in prayer, hope, and peace. I ask our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Guadalupe to pray for you and keep you close to her heart. May she and St. Joseph help you with their prayers to receive once again the one who was promised. Jesus our Lord, Emmanuel, “God is with us.”