

Besides *A Christmas Story*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, and *Home Alone*, one of my favorite Christmas movies 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!”

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, and most especially those sins that enslave us personally. 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, or scandal either* in the past, present, or future that *could ever overpower this baby and undermine His Eternal supremacy and Kingship!* 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 named Jesus is the Son of the living God and He invites ***each and every one of us*** to give our whole life ***to Him*** and to live in 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 happiness 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 and constant search for perfect happiness and perfect satisfaction. 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.

And yet brothers and sisters, the beautiful truth of Christmas and indeed all of salvation history is that God *desires us more* than we desire Him! In fact, God became one of us *precisely because* He desired us! God emptied Himself and in Christ took on our weak and fallen human nature because He wants us to share in His own divine life. And so it is *through, with, and in* Christ our Savior, 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.

As disciples of Christ, *we are a Christmas people!* We joyfully proclaim with St. John the Evangelist: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might *not perish but might have eternal life*. For God did *not* send his Son into

the world to *condemn* the world, but that the world might be *saved through him.*” This is the liberating message of Christmas!

Brothers and sisters, we celebrate Christmas so that we may *live a Christmas life*. And a Christmas life is a Christ-centered life—a life that is *totally conformed* to Christ and *His* Catholic Church. A Christmas life is a holy life lived in union with Christ where we allow our Savior to live and to love *through* us. A Christmas life is a life that is animated by the Christmas “spirit”—and the “Christmas Spirit” is none other than our *Savior’s Holy Spirit* dwelling within us!

The “Christmas Spirit” is defined by the 12 Fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. In order to sustain and foster this Christmas Spirit, we must stay close to Christ through prayer and the sacraments, most *especially* the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is *the greatest gift on earth precisely because* it is *Jesus Himself*, truly given to us in the Most Holy Eucharist!

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.* Not only did the Son of God come to give us life, but as Love incarnate, *He is the meaning* of life itself!

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 thank 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 give us the life, the happiness, the peace, and the love that we seek.