"And So It Begins!"[1]

A Reflection on the Significance of Christmas.

Second Week of Advent, Friday
Mt: 11: 16-19

Jesus was fearless in breaking down social barriers and aggressively seeking the lost. The righteous Jews of his time would refuse to be seen with anyone who was a public sinner, like Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who collaborated with the Romans and benefitted financially and socially from that arrangement. Jesus, the Son of God, incarnates the love of his Father and mounts a rescue mission to win back those judged unredeemable for whatever reason.

Not everyone agreed with his approach. His critics accused him of eating and drinking with drunkards and prostitutes. They also charged Jesus with being in league with the devil. By saying this, they were conceding these sinners belonged to Satan. Sadly, they were willing to admit defeat and leave them enslaved to the forces of darkness rather than mount a rescue mission to win them back. Little did they realize that when they put Jesus to death, they would reveal themselves as the ones in league with the devil who claims the earth belongs to his kingdom.[2]

The Latin word for devil is *diabolus*, one who scatters and divides. Jesus brings people together. That is why love, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, mercy, and peace are central features of the gospel. That is also why racist, antisemitic, homophobic slurs, insults, and bullying are an affront to what Marist School stands for. Those words are hateful, cruel, demeaning, and divisive. Their users reveal whom they are in league with. In a school whose patron is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whom the Book of Genesis foretells will crush the head of the serpent, she swings into action whenever those who bear her name forget whose side they are on.

Soon, we will celebrate the birth of Jesus. This event signals that the divine rescue mission of humanity has begun. God has entered enemy territory and is on the march as when Jesus breaks social barriers to reclaim those who are lost. He embodies the soldier's creed, "Leave no one behind!" His taking on our human nature and becoming an infant is his way of going undercover; the wisdom of this tactic is well-known to the Special Forces. While we know how the story will end, it is uplifting and encouraging to hear it told repeatedly. And so it begins with the birth of Christ.

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[1] The character King Théoden utters the phrase "So it begins" in preparation for the Battle at Helm's Deep in the movie edition of "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.

[2] In the Second Temptation of Jesus in the desert (Lk 4: 1-13), the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant and says to him, "I shall give to you all of this power and glory, all will be yours, if you worship me." What is revealing is that these earthly kingdoms belong to Satan and are under his dominion. Jesus was sent to free us from the tyranny of the Evil One, which he did through his suffering, death, and resurrection. He also announced the coming of the Reign of God, first in his very person and, now, through his mystical body, the Church. A quick review of the headlines shows that the influence of the demonic continues. The role of the Church is to serve the eviction notice!