

**Mass of Remembrance**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – November 28, 2017**  
**Rev. Robert W. Marshall, Jr.**

Last Thursday we celebrated Thanksgiving and then we were immediately thrust into the Christmas season. We are beginning to be surrounded by decorations of red and green and gold and silver. Our mailboxes are beginning to be filled with holiday invitations. There are Christmas pageants and singing Christmas trees and holiday specials on every television channel. Indeed, some radio stations have given themselves over to playing nothing but Christmas music. It is music designed to bring us cheer, to lift our spirits, to put us in a “holiday mood.” That’s especially true of Jerry Herman’s classic song, “We Need a Little Christmas” from the Broadway musical *Mame*. Sung by the title character who, at that point in the show, is decidedly down on her luck, “We Need a Little Christmas” is about putting up a brave front, making do without much money, decorating the house, singing Christmas carols and generally using the holiday to cheer everyone up. It is tempting. Amid the difficulties of our lives, amid the particular sadness that unites us here tonight, we do our best to be cheerful – to let the holly and the tinsel and the candles and the music soften our gloom and lighten our mood – if only for a moment or two. But if we leave Christmas at this level – at the level of parties and pastries and pageants – then, as we have undoubtedly discovered, the holiday will not cheer us. Indeed, the sight of so much happiness and revelry often makes our pain, our grief, seem even more acute. Oh, we need a little Christmas, but it does not seem to cheer us, it does not seem to bring us joy. Strange as it may sound, Christmas is not meant to bring us joy – Christmas is meant to bring us the hope of Jesus Christ, and it is Jesus Christ – not the holly, not the tinsel, not the parties – but only God who brings us everlasting joy.

The mission of bringing joy to troubled hearts is not foreign to Jesus. After all, our century did not invent global conflict. Jesus was born in an occupied land. He was laid in a manger away from home because of the command of an oppressive emperor thousands of miles away. He was pursued by a jealous and brutal king and his parents were forced into exile to protect him from death. Yes, Jesus can relate to our world, to our lives. From the moment of his birth, Jesus knew hardship and deprivation and violence. And from the moment of his birth, he knew love – from Mary and Joseph, from angels and shepherds, and most especially from his heavenly Father – from the God who is love. Yes, in the fullness of time, Jesus once bridged this great chasm, this gap between the cold, dark and lonely world and the warm and loving embrace of heaven. And the promise of Christmas – the true meaning of the season that seems to escape our

secular society – is that Jesus continues to bridge that gap, continues to bring light to darkness and peace to turmoil. By the power of his Spirit, Jesus continues to dwell with us, to become incarnate in our world and in our lives. Christmas is our invitation to look around, to gaze upon his marvelous light, to see Jesus in the mystical and in the mundane, in every home and among the homeless, in joyful hearts and in our sometimes heavy hearts. Jesus – Christmas – is not really about cheer but about the closeness of love.

In the Scripture passage we just heard, Jesus tells his disciples, tells us that just as he has come to dwell with us – so he has returned to the Father to make a home, a dwelling place for us. Like us, the disciples seem concerned about how to get there. We do not know where you are going, Thomas says, how can we know the way? And then Jesus assures us – I am the way and the truth and the life, he tells us. Yes, we know that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life, but sometimes we cannot seem to find him. Lost in our pain and sadness, Jesus does not seem to provide the comfort and consolation that we seek. Human suffering is like that. When we suffer, we know that we are loved, but we do not always feel loved. And sometimes we feel abandoned – by our family, by our friends, and especially by our God.

In these times of grief, we look for Jesus, for the way and the truth and the life, but too often we do not see him. As humans, we think we know it all, that we can see everything. But we forget that even with our peripheral vision, we still have blind spots. None of us can see the person directly behind us, for example – even when he is the one supporting us, holding us, caressing us, keeping us from falling apart.

As we come together tonight, we know that God is with us – in the memories of our loved ones that we share, in the loving support of all gathered here. At the holidays, we try to move closer to God – to see him in family and friends and celebration. But when we suffer, when our eyes are filled with tears and our hearts with grief, it is as though God moves closer to us. So close that he holds us up. So close that he gives us breath. So close that we do not see him, though he is always in our midst.