



Christmas 2018

Tomorrow the wickedness of the earth will be destroyed; the Savior of the world will reign over us.

Dear Parishioners:

I have always loved Christmas. Ever since I was a little boy, Christmas was my season of the year. Winter brought snow, spring brought new life, summer brought baseball and autumn its brilliant colors, but Christmas brought so much more that even now I have a hard time explaining it to you. Yes, there are the decorations, the music, family, friends and the joy we experience this time of the year, but that is only part of it. For me perhaps it's more about a feeling of hope that through Christmas and its traditions we can truly know true peace in this world and a joy that will last forever.

This past year was one of mixed blessings for us here at St Raphael. While we were blessed with 4 associates, Father Will and Father Ramsés the first half of the year and now with Father Raj and Father Daniel, endings and beginnings can be hard. We grew together as a parish family, but our church nationally and locally had to deal with more revelations of sexual abuse of minors which directly affected us here at St Raphael and St Joseph in Tontitown. Please continue to pray for all the victims of clergy sexual abuse.

I chose the above verse directly from the Gospel Acclamation from the Vigil Mass of Christmas for several reasons. First, the phrase "the wickedness of the earth will be destroyed" tells us something. The future tense reveals to us that all that works against peace, justice, righteousness, holiness and goodness will be destroyed by our Savior even if we do not yet experience this reality. Secondly, our Savior reigns over us protecting us and showing the way forward to a world that only knows peace and lasting joy.

This is my 10th Christmas with all of you and 2019 will be my 10th full year with you. I wish I could say that it will be a year without difficulties or bad things such as acts of violence, war and scandal, but take solace in knowing our Lord reigns over us and he protects us. I look forward to the year ahead and all the things we can accomplish together. Like previous years, I can't say that there will be no challenges or changing of associates, but I will be here with you.

I will always have a heart that dreams of true peace and justice and a hope that everyone will know that our Savior reigns. May this Christmas Season be for you and your family a joyful season where there is no sadness and tears but only joyful hearts. May it be a hopeful season that allows you to carry forward the desire to live in a world free from the wickedness of the earth. May it be a peaceful season so that throughout the New Year you and your family are true instruments of God's peace in the world.

On behalf of my associates, Fr. Raj and Fr. Ramos, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Father John Connell
Pastor

