

Merry Christmas!

From the students of St. Anthony's



“Let’s go to Bethlehem!”

It’s wonderful how a seemingly simple phrase in the Gospel can catch hold of one’s thoughts. The words of the shepherds after the angels left them caught my heart again this year. They heard the angelic message and wanted to go and experience the reality themselves. All we know after the encounter was that “they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished” Lk 2:17. I wonder if the experience changed them?

I met up with a few of our former students this year. A few seemed unchanged, while most were making real progress. Some I met on the street, others attended Sunday Mass when they visited Zuni. I wonder about those with whom I have lost contact, out there in the big wide world. Had they heard the message we had tried to pass on to them? Would they make a difference in the lives of others?

The message received by a few shepherds spread to many and transformed the world. They looked to the heavens and found peace on earth. Perhaps we will only ever hear of a few of those who have passed through our campus. But from those we do re-encounter, I see them advancing in life, striving to bring light and peace to those with whom they interact.

I sometimes wish I could protect our students from the negative influences that try to turn them from goodness and kindness, generosity and peace. However, they must leave our sheltered campus and move out to find their own destiny. We can only pray that the example of faculty and staff will equip them to meet the challenges they face.

It’s really not for us to see the outcome, although we hope and pray that it is successful. It is for us to sow seeds, nourish, tend to the young seedlings, and let them grow and bear witness to the wonder of life in God. They come to us, hear the good news and leave to find its value and reality for themselves. I often remember the words once spoken to me by a bishop in the barrios of Ecuador who ministers to gangs: “we must show them there is another, better way”. That is our task, and frail as we are, we undertake it day in and day out. The Bethlehem which Joseph and Mary found was remote, but from the humble stable the Word went out to renew the world. From our equally humble campus, we continue to echo those words of “hope, joy, peace and goodwill”.

Thank you for being a fellow messenger and enabling us to offer transformation to the world through the lives of our young students. I pray that the peace which the Christ Child brought to those first messengers and brings to us at St. Anthony’s will be yours this Christmas and always. Continually, “Let’s go to Bethlehem” together.

*Sincerely,
Fr. Pat*