"But in this place of which you say is a waste, there will be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness ... the voices of those who sing" (Jeremiah 33:11. Quoted by Father Greg Boyle, S.J., in *Tattoos on the Heart*, 212).

A couple of very wrong ideas have taken root in the world and, sadly, have found some fertile soil in our time. The first is this: there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives. The second is intimately related to the first: God's love is just like our love.

What Jesus taught us was that no life is of more value to God than another life; God loves each and all infinitely, tenderly. Jews matter not more than Samaritans, Catholics not more than Lutherans, Muslims not more than Hindus. It is striking that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in poverty, darkness, and rejection. The poor and marginalized are God's beloved. Why do we so often forget that?

During his whole life, Jesus' voice sang in mirth and gladness; he embodied a love beyond words that touched hearts and honored the dignity of each person he encountered as a child of God. Jesus healed and freed and encouraged as only God can. He was God's love in the flesh.

There is much to ponder here ... The gifts of God are without repentance, that is, God does not take them back; Jesus' gratitude to his Father has no ulterior motivation, for example, to secure further blessings. Ingratitude is perhaps the most common of all human failings. Gratitude, thanksgiving, is what our parents teach us from the earliest days. Gratitude is what Mary and Joseph must have taught Jesus. The wonder of this day, the source of even more gratitude for this Feast of the Nativity, is that the acknowledgment of my own ingratitude or snarkiness or presumption is not an embarrassing hindrance to God's presence. It is the prompting of God's lavish holding me in my imperfection, like a mother who holds a child that does not yet understand that love ultimately is meant to beget more love.

May Advent hope swell to Christmas joy for you and all you love.