The meaning of Christmas

THE meaning of *Avathaar* (Divine Incarnation) is this: to save mankind, God out of His love, affection and compassion, comes down to the level of man and arouses the Divine Consciousness in man. He makes man aware of Him in him, when He finds him desperately searching outside of himself for Him who is his very core.

In order to enable you to reach the highest goal of merging with the absolute, this chance has been granted to you as a reward for merit acquired in many previous lives. A bird needs two wings to fly; a cart needs two wheels to be pulled along. To journey towards the goal, man too needs study and steadfastness---*vidhya* (spiritual learning) and *thapas* (penance). The *Geetha* declares that among studies, the study of the *Aathma* is the holiest. It is known as *Aathma Vidhya* or *Brahma Vidhya* (science of the Self). The *Vidhya* shows the way; the *thapas* makes you reach the goal. The two are the two eyes that fulfil one purpose.

A farmer has to concentrate his efforts during certain favourable seasons, when ploughing and sowing have to be done. He cannot afford to count the cost or calculate the trouble. Rain or shine, night or day, he has to do the task, so that he can reap the harvest. So too, for you students, this is the period of life when you have to be active and alert. Your future is shaped by what you do now. Now is the very foundational stage of your life, when you prepare your mind, to meet its challenges and your intelligence, to solve its riddles.

God alone is the *Guru,* others are teachers

You are called *'Vidhyaarthi,'* one who seeks *Vidhya.* But, it is a misfortune that most students seek, no *vidhya* (subjective enlightenment), but *Vishaya* (objective pleasure). Both *Guru* and *Sishya* (teacher and pupil) have fallen from the ideal. The pupil, should be the player, and the teacher, the director; the pupil should be like Arjuna, the wielder of the bow, the teacher should be like Krishna, the *Yogeshwara* (Lord of Divine Communion); the pupil should be *purusha* (person) and the *Guru* the *Purushothama* (spiritual preceptor). This is the reason why the *Guru* is exalted as Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara and as *Parabrahma* (Supreme Reality) Itself.

God alone is the *guru;* others can at best be *Upaadhyaayas* or *Adhyaapaks* (teachers, instructors). The *Guru* out of His infinite compassion and wisdom counsels the most beneficent path. The *shishya* (pupil) out of his infinite devotion, follows it and attains the goal. Arjuna said, after listening to the Lord's counsel, *"Karishye vachanam thava,"* "I shall act according to your words." You have to be pupils like him. Then, you can live in peace and joy in this warring world of misery and demonstrate in your lives the excellence of the *Bhaaratheeya* (Indian) tradition and culture.

God is Eternal Power, Omnipotent, Omniscient. He is the cause and consequence---the potter, the clay and the pot. Without God, there can be no Universe. He willed and the Universe happened. It is His play, the manifestation of His power. Man embodies His Will, His power, His Wisdom. But, he is unaware of this glory. The cloud of ignorance veils the truth. God sends sages, saints and prophets to unveil the Truth and Himself appears as an *Avathaar* (divine incarnation) to awaken and liberate him.

Resolve to practise what all Jesus taught

Two thousand years ago, when narrow pride and thick ignorance defiled mankind, Jesus came as the embodiment of Love and compassion and lived among men, holding forth the highest ideals of life. You must pay attention to the lessons he elaborated in the various stages of his life. 'I am the Messenger of God,' he declared, first. Yes. Each individual has to accept that role and live as examples of Divine Love and Charity. The *guru* must; act as the alarm-clock; he should awaken the sleeper to his duty to himself. *" Uththishtha! jaagratha, " as the Upanishaths* proclaim---"Arise! Awake." And bear witness to the God within, in every thought, word and deed.

This day, Christmas is celebrated. Bring to mind the words he uttered, the advice he offered, the warning he gave, and decide to direct your daily lives along the path he laid down. His words must be imprinted on your hearts and you must resolve to practise all that he taught.

There are two points of view that struggle for acceptance by you---the *Paramaarthika* and the *Vyavahaarika---the* spiritual and the worldly, the reality-based and the appearance-based. After this discourse is over, when you proceed from this Hostel building towards Prashaanthi Nilayam, imagine you see a snake appearing on the road. In reality, it is only a length of rope. But, it appears as a snake and you feel a sense of terror. Your terror does not change the rope into a snake. When you apply light from a torch, you discover that the rope was ever a rope. The Universe is what appears; the Reality is Divinity, *Brahmam.* When the Light of Wisdom shines, the Truth is revealed. The Universe is enveloped by Divinity; it is the vesture. Jesus declared, "Death is the dress of life."

Jesus bore no ill-will towards any one

Jesus knew that God Wills all. So, even on the cross, when he suffered agony, he bore no ill-will towards any one and he exhorted those with him to treat all as instruments of His Will. "All are one; be alike to every one." Practise this attitude in your daily lives. Of course it is very difficult to develop unwavering faith in this great truth. The mind, as Arjuna complained, hops from belief to doubt, from one conclusion to its negation and it causes turmoil and confusion. But, there is one method by which it can be conquered.

The black-bee can bore a hole in the hardest wood. But, when dusk intervenes while it is sipping the nectar from the lotus-flower and, as a result, when the open petals close in on the bee, it finds itself imprisoned, with no hope of escape. It does not know how to deal with softness! So too, the mind can play its tricks and jump wantonly about on any arena; when placed on the lotus feet of the Lord, it becomes inactive and harmless. In order to offer the mind entirely to the Lord deep detachment from worldly desires is needed. Superficial devotion or shallow steadfastness cannot succeed. To fell the hard sandal wood tree, a heavy axe of steel is needed.

It is the privilege of this stage of life to cultivate this detachment, to subdue the vagaries of the mind, and to manifest the Divinity that is latent in you. That Divinity when expressed in action blossoms into loving service of fellow-beings. It renders the heart pure, free from pride and greed.

Be ever ready to cast the body away

Jesus wandered purposefully in lonely places for twelve long years, engaging himself in study, spiritual exercises and meditation on God. Of course, one must protect and preserve the body, which is a Divine gift, a boat equipped with instruments through which man can cross the Sea of

Perpetual Change and reach Divinity. This goal of life has to be reached before the body-boat develops leaks and disintegrates, through illness, sloth and senility. Physical, mental and spiritual health has to be fostered with vigilant care. Nevertheless, 'one' must be ever ready to east the body away in defence of *dharma* or *dhaiva* (goodness or God). Have Jesus as your ideal for this. He exhorted all to observe the basically valid teachings of the ancient scriptures and to derive peace and joy therefrom.

The Jews held the rituals and regulations laid down by the prophets in the scriptural texts as valid for all time and so, they held the teachings of Jesus as wrong. They were not moved by personal hatred towards Jesus.

The problem arises in every age---the conflict between the letter and the spirit---the doctrines that are held sacred, the *manthra* (sacred formula) that is held to be holy, the various do's and don'ts that have to be scrupulously followed, and the underlying truth. In the *Vedhic* Faith also, one can find today this conflict between the upholders of ancient tradition and the promoters of deeper understanding. These later also base their teachings on the *Vedhas.*

Thought, word and deed must be one

The best way to resolve the confusions and conflicts that hamper moral, ethical, material, technological and spiritual progress is for man to live as fully as man ought to, and rise to the height of the Divine that is his Reality. That is the one Eternal, Universal teaching. The thoughts that the intellect frames must be reflected as feelings in the mind and translated into action by the hands. Thought, word, and deed must be coordinated. They must fulfil one another. The sign of a holy person or *Maanava* is, *"Manasyekam Vaachasyekam Karmanyekam," "One* mind, one word, one act." The three are one, not different.

Christmas means the Mass that is held on the birthday of Christ. It is fundamentally a sacred religious rite. To deal with it as if it is a festival for drinking and dancing or even for recalling Jesus to memory is very wrong. The day must be spent in prayer; not merely this day, but cultivate the *saadhana* (spiritual discipline) of prayer as a normal way of life. Prayers for worldly ends do not reach God. They will reach only those deities who deal with such restricted spheres. But, all prayers arising from pure love, unselfish eagerness to render service and hearts that are all-inclusive will reach God. For, God is the very Embodiment of love. We know that we have to see the Moon only through Moonlight. So too, God who is love can be seen and realised only through love. Love is God, Live in Love. That is the Message I give you.

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> *Above all, recognise this truth: Sai is in all. When you hate another, you are hating Sai; when you hate Sai, you are hating yourself When you inflict pain on another name, remember that the other is yourself, in another form, with another name.*
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> *Envy causes pain on those who are envied. When another's fortune is green, why should your eyes be red? Why get wild when another eats his fill?*
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> *Give up this vice of envy; be happy when another is happy. That is more pleasing to the Lord than all the* manthras *you recite, or all*

the flowers you heap on his picture or image, or even the hours you spend in japam or dhyaanam (silent recitation of holy words or meditation).

Sri Sathya Sai