

The Greatest Gift  
Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Christmas  
Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 8:7-9



*But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace also. <sup>8</sup>I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. <sup>9</sup>For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.*

The sermon today must start with a big “ahhhh” and “ohhhh” because today, we encounter a thought so beautiful and great that it is beyond any human imagination. And I can only say in amazement: “Ahh, how wonderful!” From the outset, we have to admit that what is said in these words cannot be fully grasped by any human being. I am sure that even the author, Paul, didn’t fully understand what his words meant. That’s why I’m repeating the words so that we can approach the idea slowly and from a distance. If we do this, we just get a small idea that something really big is being spoken of here. I’ll read the words once more: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.*

The first thought that my human mind comes up against is the richness of Jesus because we first get to know Jesus as a poor baby in a manger who ultimately had to suffer a cruel death. When Paul says, “though He was rich,” he means all the riches Jesus had in heaven with God the Father. Heaven is nearly incomprehensible to us and infinitely far away. In the Creation account, it is also written that an angel with a sword guards the gate to heaven so that no mortal can enter. So it is not only physically impossible to reach heaven, but it is also intellectually impossible to imagine it at all. We stand here at the other end and can’t imagine the things of God. Just as a child inside its mother only knows the little bubble of water in which it lives for nine months, we also only understand this little space called “world.” From here, it is impossible to see God or to even imagine what it means to be close to Him. Yet today, we dare to approach this space. We do it because it’s Christmas. We do it because Jesus comes from this closeness to God and He is among us. And we do it because Jesus became a human being, that is a person like us, with eyes, nose, ears, two arms and legs, with human feelings. Yet this very man Jesus was with God. He was therefore in a place that no human being can reach. He broke through this barrier where the angel with the sword stands and He came to us. This means that we can see, taste, and feel something of God and of heaven when we are close to Jesus. That’s why I like to join in with the shepherds, the wisemen, the ox, and the donkey as I kneel at the manger, look inside it with curiosity, and ask: “What will happen when heaven comes to me? What will happen when I can understand what is actually incomprehensible?”

What will happen when Jesus comes to me? My curiosity is now awakened and I am looking for this Jesus who was already in heaven and is now among us. So I open the Gospels and walk with Jesus. I follow in His footsteps like Peter, James, John, and the others. In fact, you can discover many things in Jesus’ presence that don’t fit in with our world at all. There are many examples of this. Jesus was able to heal the sick, even raise the dead, calm the sea, and feed thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and some fish out of a boy’s backpack. I read about these miracles and marvel at it all. Yet, these stories of miracles remain far removed from my everyday life. My mind intervenes and says: All this seems impossible! That can’t happen! We can’t prove any of this! But I continue to read and quickly realize that this Jesus from heaven doesn’t place that much emphasis on the miracles. When the Israelites of the time insistently asked Him to repeat the miracle of multiplying the fish and loaves, He expressly refused and said something strange – we should

instead eat Him as bread otherwise we would die! That is a really strange thought and I can understand why so many people turned away disappointed at the time. Nevertheless, I continue reading and, like a golden thread, I discover one thing about this Jesus that can maybe explain what heaven is like the best. In Him, I discover true, genuine, and limitless love and I realize that this Jesus truly loves everyone! He especially loves the degenerate, the sinners, and all those who are guilty. Through this, He wants to show us that no one is excluded from God's love. Therefore, heaven must be a place where there is great love, a place where there is no room for competition, a place where people aren't oppressed, manipulated, or despised at all, a place where you immediately realize: this is my home. The love there is so great that I can even say: my own parents can't love me as much as I am loved there. So heaven must actually be a home, a place where I can be safe, where everything is good. I notice that I'm raving about this place and that I have to come back to my senses and put both feet back on the ground in this world where none of these things are. Yes, what we are experiencing is actually the opposite of heaven – war and hatred are a part of the reality that we have to deal with. And now I get to the very best part. Jesus, who came from heaven, who is Himself actually heaven, doesn't shy away from such things at all. He goes directly where there is hatred, envy, jealousy, and death, and even more than that, He suffers these things Himself in His own body. He is despised, spit upon, whipped, and finally, cruelly murdered. I don't need to go on because we know this part of Jesus well and we can relate to it all. We can't understand the part of Jesus in heaven, but we *can* understand the part where He dies on the cross. For such cruelties still exist today. We can even confirm the feelings of hatred, envy, and resentment that were poured onto Jesus from our own feelings because such feelings are also within us. Now we get to the very best part. Jesus placed Himself under our cruelty and hate so that we could be a part of Him. He, who was rich, became poor for our sake so that we could become rich. Now I must go back to the beginning where I come to something that is difficult for the mind to comprehend because if Jesus came to us from heaven, then there is only one purpose – we are to go to heaven. We are to go where there is only love, we are meant to come to this place that we can't even begin to understand with our human minds. I can't comprehend all of this. I go back to the manger and to the cross at the same time. I join the shepherds, wisemen, and the many generations who have also stood at the feet of Jesus, and I notice that you don't have to understand this Jesus with your intellect. After all, He is from heaven and not from our world. There are other ways in which we can approach Him. Jesus Himself said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16) These words are a comfort to me because I can't understand Jesus with my mind, and I don't need to. Faith is key! And this faith is given to me by none other than Jesus Himself. He is the one who came from heaven with the sole purpose of making us rich. Being rich means believing in Him and therefore being connected to God in heaven. That's exactly what Jesus means when He says that we should eat His body and drink His blood. When we eat His body and blood in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, then we are truly and tangibly connected to heaven.

So what happens now? Now it gets even more exciting because if this Jesus is in me and is a part of my life, then a part of heaven is in and with me too. This means that the people in my family, in my city, and everywhere I go can see, feel, and taste Jesus and His great love because Jesus in me is doing exactly what He has always done: He loves people. This Jesus in you and in me loves people to this day. No one should be left out. We can pass on the riches He has given us to so many people. And then heaven on earth will truly have arrived. May you have a blessed Christmas! Amen.