

**Pre-Christmas Mass with Bexar County Jail Inmates  
December 16, 2016**

**My dear brothers, here we are, so close to the start of the season of hope and of light. We are just days away from the dawning of the Christmas Season. It is my honor to be here with all of you so that we can celebrate the hope of that season together. Here where we live on the earth, the days are getting darker and darker. Christmas comes just at that time when the days start to get longer again, right when the light begins to grow in the darkness. Christ is our light and our hope!**

**This is why Pope Francis has started to give his Wednesday talks on the topic of hope. Last week he said: “Christian hope is not the same as being optimistic about the future, but is knowing that whatever dark or frightening things are going on in one’s life, God is there offering protection and light.” You see, brothers, there it is again. God is our light and our protection in the dark times of life.**

**Jesus spoke of the light in the Gospel for today. He talked about his light, but also the light that was shared by St. John the Baptist. As our savior put it, “John was a burning and shining lamp.” This was why John was sent by God, to prepare the Lord’s way and to help people open their eyes to the light of his love and salvation.**

**But Jesus’ coming is not the end of the story, it is the beginning. When we celebrate the light of Christmas, we don’t just stop there. Jesus comes to bring his light to a dark world, but also to share that light with us. He comes to give us hope – true hope that saves us. Once again we can learn from Pope Francis. He says: “God, with his**

love, walks with us. I hope because God is alongside me. And this is something all of us can say. I have hope because God walks with me, he walks alongside me and holds my hand.” The light we receive from Christ is his very presence with us. Christ is born and walks with us. He puts his Holy Spirit within us to shine brightly and guide our way. He helps us turn away from the darkness, to “observe what is right, do what is just” (Isaiah). We in turn can share that light with others as we place our hope in God, just like John the Baptist.

As Christmas approaches, my brothers, I want to ask you an important question. Do you have hope in Christ Jesus? I’m talking about real hope – that deep abiding trust that God will always be with you, walking beside you in any darkness. Do you hope in God? This is the joy of Christmas, my friends. Hope dawns in the world in a new way. Hope dawns in your hearts in a new way, shaping them and making them perfect. May we pray together: “Come, Lord, bring us your peace that we may rejoice before you with a perfect heart” (verse before the Gospel).

Dear brothers, I ask Our Lady of Guadalupe to help you with her prayers today. She is our mother, and she loves us. She can teach us the true meaning of hope, because she placed all her hope in the Lord, no matter what. She can teach you to trust in the light of the Lord no matter what darkness may come, and to share that light like she did so well. Her son comes into the world to be our light and our hope. Blessed are we when we put our trust in him.