

CHRISTMAS DAY

DECEMBER 25, 2019

On most Sunday mornings here at Glastonbury Abbey our Mass attendance is composed mostly of adults, a good number of us mature in age. But sometimes parents bring their children with them, including infants and toddlers who are ready to run around at any moment. Sometimes they sing loudly as they pick up the music easily. We watch them walk up to communion and often they feel left out as they do not receive the body and blood of Christ. What is evident is that the eyes of the adults are on the children. You can see the delight in their eyes as they watch the spontaneous movements of a child. Children bring life and joy to our gathering.

Jesus loved children. More than once in the gospels he gathered children to bless them. He told the adults that they need to become like children in order to enter the kingdom of God.

Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as an infant, the beginning of his own childhood in the flesh. The Word of God had already been in the world since the very beginning of creation. The gospel today reminds us that “all things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.” For billions of years the Word of God moved through creation, through plants, and animals, dinosaurs and whales, and all that exists. God created the world out of love. All creation glorifies God by being what they were made to be.

Then along came humans. With free will and a yearning to be more than they already were, they stumbled along. Then God kissed creation in an act of love and “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” God would come and show us how to be what we were made to be – human beings with the ability to love, to be happy, as well as to share in the sufferings of the world. God gave us power to become children of God.

Christmas is one bookend in the story of the life of Jesus. The other bookend is the crucifixion. The Word of God took upon himself all that is human and showed us what that means. Love means vulnerability, humility, dependence on others, respect and acceptance of all the children of God no matter what race, religion, gender or any other differences than our own. Love means accepting one’s own frailty and the forgiveness of others. Jesus showed us what that all means not only in words but in actions.

Christmas means God is one of us. God becomes human so that we might become like God. To accept our humanity fully is hard work. Christ remains with us to help us on the way.

Children are needed to teach us what it means to be human. They teach us spontaneity, a sense of wonder, vulnerability, openness. We need children in order to become mature adults.

Recently I heard of a married couple that has decided not to bear children because they don't want to bring a child into this mixed-up world. The birth rate is going down in our country and in all first world, affluent countries. The state of the environment calls on us to live simpler, humbler lives in harmony with all creation. But selfishness, greed and indifference often prevent us from being the human beings we were created to be.

Christmas is a feast of love. We live in an enchanted world, suffused with the Word of God in every ounce of matter. As Christians we need to believe this and live lives of hope. We are here to make the world better. We are here to care for each other, to help each other.

Have you heard of Archbishop Oscar Romero? He was canonized as a Saint this past Fall. Some forty years ago he was the bishop of El Salvador at a time when civil war, military oppression, murder of priests, nuns and laity were taking place. He spoke out for a change of action in the country. He lived among chaos, tension and threats to his life. In fact, he was shot and killed while celebrating Mass.

Here is what Oscar Romero had to say about Christmas –

“The light that shined so brilliantly in Bethlehem is a sign of our hope. Let us not be discouraged when our hope is tried and put to the test. Let us hope against all hope and hold fast to that hope in the fullness of time. Let us live the ideals that God has realized and accomplished.”

May we all live in hope and give the gift of hope on this Christmas day to all who live in darkness and who look for light.

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