

Homily: Sunday 3rd January 2021

2nd Sunday in Christmastime

Readings (Year B): 1st; Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2.8-12. Psalm; 147. 2nd;
Ephesians 1:3-6.15-18. Gospel; John 1:1-5.9-14

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There had been a peace rally a few weeks before Christmas some years ago. Among those on the platform in Trafalgar Square was Cardinal Hume. Making his way through the crowds afterwards, media reporters were trying to get comments from those who had been speaking. One, to his astonishment asked “What does Christmas mean to you?”

Cardinal Hume wrote ‘I was rather taken aback and had to react at once and said the first thing that came into my mind. It was this “The great and awesome God became man for me’ The reporter said ‘thank you’ and didn’t pursue the subject.

Hume went on ‘It was only after I had gone 15 yards or so it dawned on me what I had said. Here was a familiar truth which I had known all my life. But at that moment the simple truth that God had become man seemed to me quite staggering, and I realised I was looking at a familiar truth in a new way.

It is so easy to celebrate Christmas and miss the main point, or become so familiar with the Christian teaching about it that it fails to make its impact. It should have a profound effect upon our lives. It is the feast at which we celebrate God’s entry into our world as a human being. He entered into our world in order to enter into our lives; he came to share what we are, to give meaning to what we do, to heal wounds, to give life.

St John seems to take it for granted that his readers were familiar with the story of Jesus’ origins from Matthew and Luke, who present Jesus as the descendant and fulfilment of past hopes and models. In him was the new exodus and the new covenant. Matthew traced him back to Abraham, our father in faith. Luke traced him back to Adam. John digs much deeper.

John's prologue, our Gospel reading, which we also hear at the Day Mass on Christmas morning, is like a musical overture, introducing the main items of the gospel to be developed in subsequent chapters.

So we have **light, life, darkness, testimony, faith glory and truth.**

This network of images and ideas is held together around Jesus, the Word, who is portrayed as the Creator and Redeemer of all things. So John traces the origin of the Word into eternity, past, where God the Son was present with God the Father before time itself began. This opening verse of John, is a direct allusion to the opening verse of the Bible. As in Genesis, John draws attention to light, darkness, life and the spoken word that brought all things into existence. It is implied that the universe, once created through the Word of God, is now being renewed through that same Word come in the flesh as Jesus Christ.

Our 1st reading from Ecclesiasticus: a part of the wisdom literature of Scripture, which reflects a search for the wise action in all humanity's dealings. Wisdom does not have an intellectual emphasis but refers to integrity of life. Wisdom is the first of the seven gifts of the Spirit, which Genesis mentions as hovering over the waters.

The origin of Wisdom is in God; wisdom is not a being separate from God. The perspective is that wisdom is basically a word or utterance from God. Wisdom is personified and is seen very much as God's mediator in his creation and in his dealings with his people. This thought is picked up in the New Testament and used to express the role of Christ. As wisdom was seen taking abode, pitching her tent – in Israel, so is the word made flesh, pitching his tent, the Greek word used literally means 'pitching his tent,' which a translation has 'tabernacled.' Can you see the connection: the red light at our tabernacles, proclaiming 'God dwelling among us in his body and blood here and now.'

John's gospel is the story of two great movements, down and up. The Word of the Father came down into our world so as to lift us up to a new level of life in his return to glory. God has spoken to us in a word, a language that all can understand, the language of human life. And the word is the true light, that enlightens all, and nothing can overcome that light.

But this word of life and light is daily submerged under the torrent of trivial words...empty words....words of no direction...words of no life.

T.S.Eliot wrote that we have ‘knowledge of words and ignorance of “The Word.” And he asked ‘Where is the life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?’

We must protect the Word that God has spoken to us by distancing ourselves from empty and dead words; in discovering silence.

Like Mary, pondering on the things that were said. Praying daily in the Angelus: ‘ And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.’

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