

NOT TO BE PUT INTO A BOX

Years ago I might talk to my mother in early January and she would say, “We put Christmas in a box.” Obviously, she meant that they took down the Christmas decorations. We may put the decorations in a box but the spirit of Christmas, what we celebrate now, isn’t to be put into a box but rather be lived always. At Christmas, we celebrate the love of God that goes beyond our imagination. But what does that mean? Much more than can be put into one homily but here are three points.

One—Jesus reveals God’s love for us. In the person of Jesus, God has entered into our world in a real, concrete, visible, physical, tactual way. He enters as we did, small, naked and helpless. In Jesus, the creator becomes a creature; the all powerful one, limited; the invisible one, visible. Jesus comes as one of us, like us in all things but sin; truly God and truly human; truly God, because only God can save and truly human, because only another person can give us an example. Jesus doesn’t just speak the word of God as did the prophets of old but rather he is the word God speaks. Jesus is the human face of God, the sacrament of the Father.

Two—Jesus comes to save us, to love us even unto death, death on a cross. He comes to free us from sin which diminishes joy, our peace, our humanity. He comes to lead us out of the prison of our own ego into the joy of generous love. He comes to save us from eternal death. He comes not just to reveal God to us but to reveal to us what it means to be human. Sin dehumanizes us. The fact that Jesus is without sin doesn’t make him less human, it makes him more human. There’s a dignity to human life that God found worth saving. Christmas reminds us of the dignity due to all human life at every age and every stage, born and unborn, young and old, good and bad, sick and healthy.

Three—Jesus comes to draw us into the life of God. Jesus doesn’t just come to die but to rise from the dead and lead us to new life. At every Mass at the preparation of the gifts, the priest or deacon will quietly say, *By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.* That one sentence summarizes so much of what Christmas is about but also what Christianity is about. *In and through Jesus, God loves us in a way that is*

both divine and human so that we in turn might love God and our neighbor in a way that is both human and even somewhat divine; to love those who don't love us; to love those we don't like; to love our neighbor as ourselves, even to love our enemies. Salvation isn't just being saved from something bad but also being saved for something good, for someone good who is the source of all good.

Here in the Eucharist, Jesus continues to enter into our world. The same Jesus who was present in the manger becomes present on the altar. The greatest Christmas present is the one we receive, who we receive. In the Eucharist, Jesus is the gift that truly keeps on giving, so we may follow him everyday with lives of intentional faith.

So when we put Christmas decorations in a box may we never put away what we celebrate now. Jesus comes to reveal God's love to us; Jesus comes to save us; Jesus comes to lead us into the very life of God. May our hearts be open to receiving, accepting, loving and sharing that gift this Christmas and always.