

WHEN GOD SHOWS US HIS FACE

Last Sunday, in our responsorial psalm we prayed: *Lord, let us see your face.* In the Old Testament, there is a prayer we hear a number of times about the face of God. *Hide not your face; let me see your face; let your face shine on your servant, seek his face.* But there's a problem, scripture says no one can see God's face and live.

At Christmas, the problem is solved and that prayer is answered. Jesus comes as the human face of God. Through the marvelous mystery we call the Incarnation, not reincarnation which is foreign to Christian thought, but through the Incarnation, through the enfleshment, in the person of Jesus, God has become human. The creator becomes a creature; the immortal one, mortal; the infinite one finite. Jesus enters into the world in a real, physical, tangible, tactual way. He comes not as a philosophical idea or theological concept, but with a body.

Christianity is a historical religion. It's not just abstract truths but rather it exists because something happened and that something is the Incarnation. It exists because someone has come and that someone is Jesus. He enters into the world with a human birth, small, naked and helpless and he places himself into our hands. He is Emmanuel—God with us. One author has noted that God is so great that he can make himself small.

When people come to receive Communion, they're told, *The Body of Christ.* And they respond. *Amen.* Yes, this is the Body of Christ. But before that, Jesus rose from the dead in a body, and before that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, in a body and before that he preached and healed in a body and before that, he was born of the Virgin Mary in a body. So there's a real connection, a real presence, between the child born in Bethlehem and the Eucharist we receive where Jesus continues to place himself into our hands.

Here at Mass, Jesus continues to enter into our world as we gather in his name, through those who minister in his name, in his word that is proclaimed and in a very real and abiding way under the form of bread and wine. Jesus is truly the gift that

keeps on giving and here in the Eucharist we can honestly say, every day is Christmas.

That's the *what* of our celebration today. And then there's the *why*? Why does God do all this? The answer very simply is love. In the Middle Ages St. Catherine of Siena expressed this rather dramatically when she cried to God [*You*] *acted as if you were drunk with love, infatuated with your creature... you engrafted your divinity into the dead tree of our humanity.* The why is love, *as if you were drunk with love.* That's just another way of saying that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Jesus enters into the world truly God and truly human; truly God, because only God can save us and truly human, because only another person can give us an example.

St. John Paul II noted that Jesus reveals God to us but he also reveals what it means to be human. The fact that Jesus is without sin doesn't make him less human but more human, because sin is something that dehumanizes us. In the infant of Bethlehem, God sheds human tears. There's a dignity to human life that God found worth saving.

There's a dignity and a respect to be given to every human life. By his Incarnation, Jesus has in one way, united himself to every human person. Christmas reminds us of the dignity due to all human life at every age and every stage, born and unborn, young and old, sick and healthy.

Out of love he comes to reconcile us to God, to regain what has been lost by evil. Sin is a separation from what is good, from what is of God. He comes to remove sin and reconnect us to God. He comes so that we might know God's love. To love is to make oneself vulnerable. By the human birth of Jesus, God makes himself vulnerable to us. He comes to make what is known as *the marvelous exchange.* He takes on our humanity so that we might share in his divinity.

Not only that, Jesus, who is the human face of God, taught us to see him in others, especially in those who are in need. *I was hungry and you gave me to eat, sick and you visited him, a stranger and you welcomed me* and all the rest.

Sometimes people will think and even ask, *Why doesn't God just reveal himself plainly for us to see?* Well he has. When God shows his face it looks like Jesus. In

the person of Jesus he has revealed himself clearly and in a very radical way. Perhaps some people might prefer a more distant God but our God wants to be close to us.

People exchange Christmas gifts. The gifts are to be reflections, expressions of love that strive in some small way, to make visible what is invisible. But the greatest Christmas gift isn't among those we exchange with one another. The greatest Christmas gift is one we receive, Jesus.

This great love of God calls for a response on our part, a response in love. In Jesus, God makes a gift of himself to us in love. We in turn seek to make a gift of ourselves in Jesus to God in love. Christmas calls us to conversion, to lives of ever more intentional faith in Jesus; not accidental faith, not hit and miss faith, but lives of intentional faith where faith is the rudder that guides the ship of our lives. He desires to be close to us. Does he find room in the inn of your heart? God is love. God loves us. God desires our love. God desires *your* love, *your* love. Even amidst turmoil, pandemic and emotional fatigue, Christ gives us hope and love.

Over the centuries there's been a prayer, *Lord, show us your face*. In Jesus, that prayer has been answered. Jesus, is the human face of God.