

Homily for Christmas

December 20, 2018

Intro: We have placed the child in the manger; now we sing the angels' song: Glory to God in the Highest.

Tom Murphy: "He is coming;" "he has arrived." Readings explicate.

Readings:

Isaiah repeats the message we heard from Micah last Sunday: The messiah begins as a child of David's line who will rule over all Israel, forever. Even now they name him *Wonder-Counselor*, the one who plans with the wisdom of Solomon. He is also God-Hero, the warrior who is Prince of Peace. He will sustain his vast dominion over God's people by judgment and justice.

Hebrews goes way beyond Israel's ordinary expectations of a messianic king when it says that this son of God is not only the heir of all things, but he was also their source: all things were created through him. He is the brilliance of God's glory, the imprint of God's very being. He sustains all things by his mighty word, but he really takes his throne at God's right hand when he dies for our sins. His obedience to His Father's saving plan is what makes him Lord of all.

Note how way before and long after Jesus' career, he is expected to be a mighty messiah.

Luke, however, gives us a different picture. Jesus, as a subject of the Roman empire, is displaced from his birth at home and is eventually born on the street and laid in a manger. He is the weakest of all life, a human infant. Those who first worship him are the animals who gaze on their Lord in their manger. The next worshippers were outcasts of Israel city life---the shepherds. There is nothing glorious about his birth, nor about the first thirty years of his life. Nothing indicates that he will be the powerful messiah.

The Meaning for us:

Life is surprising, and it is a struggle. At no time in his life will Jesus be more vulnerable or work harder to make it. A newborn in the first 24 hours does more work than he will ever do later in life. He must regulate his temperature outside the womb; he must learn to breathe; he must learn to coordinate his heartbeat with his breath; he must learn to take nourishment by sucking. And if he survives the exertions of the first 24 hours, he is more vulnerable apart from his parents' protection than any other animal. This is how God manifests himself as the Prince of Peace.

Why does God do this? Because it is not power that brings in peace, but the vulnerability of the child that draws forth the best from us. When we see a helpless child, we respond to a plea for help. And that response is the response that leads to world peace. When we come to the aid of the weak, we are peace-makers, and that is the way that Jesus Christ is the prince of Peace. I suppose that is why Christmas is a children's feast and yet one that delights parents and other adults.

That is the genius of God's plan for us. It is the Downs syndrome child, the one with cystic fibrosis, the blind and the deaf, the aged with dementia, the refugee at our gate that is the bringer of peace for us. If we ignore the vulnerable, we ignore Christ, we ignore God's plan, we spend our lives in war. The world without the Downs syndrome child is not a better place; it is a world without God's appeal which makes us lovers.

Take some time this Christmas to contemplate the child in the manger, In your imagination, take him into your arms and hold him. And while you hold your own child or your own grandchild, think of them as the Christ for you. And soon you should begin to see others' children the same way; you will see your wife or husband as the little child grown large; you will see the stranger at the gate as Christ's silent appeal for your care and love. And you will be, in Christ, the prince of peace.