

From The Pastor

Finding ourselves in the midst of the Christmas feast, I pray that the Lord touches you deeply with a renewed awareness of His Incarnate love. Christmas is, of course, more than just one day. It is a way of being in all our days. The energy and excitement of Christmas day is a wonderful expression of the love and family life that the Incarnation has entered and brought to a completely new level. The love and appreciation we have for our family and friends tends to be more fully expressed this time of year, yet the love is felt and known throughout the year in many and various ways.

‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us’. This is the full time, ever-present constancy of the gift of Jesus born of the Virgin. We tend to compartmentalize the presence and action of God in our lives when things are going well or we feel an active sense of God’s presence. This would be a mistake. God is ever-present, always with us in all that we do, and all that we are. God is not a feeling, and should not be measured in such a way. The reality of the Incarnation is that, now, all creation is charged with the presence and the grandeur of God. Feeling good or bad, blest or guilty, sick or well is beside the point. God is present in all human reality.

The beauty of God’s presence is seen in the awareness that God is here purely out of desire. God chose, God desired to come and share our experience and be with us. The Incarnation is a pure act of love. It is a revelation of all that God is. God is perfect love, and perfect love brings forth and desires perfect unity. God could not have created and not have been an active part of all that was made. God is with us purely out of love. He wants to be here. He wants to be known and loved by all He has made.

The Incarnation reveals the humility of God. Perfect love is humble and fully considers the other before the self. To say that God is almighty is not to say that God is the fullness of control through power and authority. God is the opposite of what we consider power. The power of God is the power of love, and true love is humble. God’s almightiness is the unlimited, freely given, self-surrender we see in the gift of Jesus. All that the Father is is poured into the Son so that the world can begin to know the hidden richness and mystery of God’s glory. God’s glory is his perfect goodness. Without Jesus, we would never be able to perceive the reality of the One who created us. Jesus is the revelation of the glory and utter goodness of God. In Jesus the Father is revealed, through Jesus we are united to the Father in the reconciling love of the Son. This is the necessity and the beauty of Jesus as fully human and fully divine. Jesus is divine; he chooses to accept in humility and love all that is human.

Today’s feast of the Holy Family is a precious and effective example of the Incarnation. Like God, the word and the reality of what it means to be holy is often relegated to rare and special moments that seem to turn out perfect. This is not correct. To be holy does not mean to be perfect. To be holy is to be like God, or perhaps better said, to be God-like. What is God like? Humble, self-giving, vulnerable, loving and totally accepting of all persons. This is the short list, but you get the picture.

Jesus embodies all of these divine qualities. In doing so, he had a very messy life. It was not convenient or well put together. Persons and things were received and responded to on the fly. To be holy means to allow and accept the messiness of life and to consistently respond with love. This is why the family of Jesus is called holy. Birth in a manger, a flight into Egypt for fear of the child’s life, loss of the father much too early, and finally the Son surrenders himself to death. That is a messy life, but one that held to faith and was secure in love.

Notice today’s story. This is a very normal reality for family living; someone gets left behind. You could say Jesus was being selfish and insensitive for not letting his parents know where he was. You could also say that Mary and Joseph were negligent and irresponsible for leaving town without having their Son in hand. What were they thinking? This is the painful messiness of life that calls for the holiness of humility, patience, and love. This is what Mary and Joseph did. They found their Son, they forgave him, and they went forward.

Like most parents, Mary and Joseph did not understand. Like most parents, they could stand around waiting for the perfect explanation. They held the experience in their hearts. They prayed and they trusted. So many painful experiences in life are accidental oversights, innocent misunderstandings, and unintended offenses. Such things are painful, especially to children, because they are not seen for what they are. The pain is felt, and it leaves its mark. So innocent and unintended, such things can become a life wound or long painful memory. This messiness needs to meet holiness. It calls for humble surrender to love and forgiveness rooted in the vulnerable nature of what it means to be human. This is the Incarnation. Perfect is not part of the definition. The call is for wholeness: to be healthy and in sound condition grounded in love. This describes Jesus who suffered much in love, yet grew into the wholeness of himself on the Cross, for our redemption. God be praised that we become more and more like Jesus.

May God bless and secure your family in the wholeness of humility, forgiveness, acceptance that is the holiness of Jesus.