



Second Sunday after Christmas: 3rd and 4th January 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The word was made flesh and He lived among us.”

I don't know about you but I find it a bit challenging sometimes to keep up with the latest terminology that is bandied about. On Monday 28th December there was a heading in The Times Newspaper “Young becoming more religious as others lose faith”. I thought “that's interesting, I must read it.” Then the opening lines of the article began: “members of generation Z in their late teens and early twenties are more likely to believe in God than millennials in their late twenties and thirties, according to polling that suggests the trend for young people being less religious is changing”. Well I've heard of “millennials” and they could be up to 38 years old by now! But “generation Z” is a bit more puzzling! They are the newest generation being born between 1997 and 2015 so they are between 8 and 23 years old. Knowing these things is important for marketing purposes, I believe.

But it is not just terminology concerning generations that can be a challenge. The terminology used in Scripture and the Teaching of the Church can be quite a challenge too, even for people brought up in the Catholic Faith and Tradition. A good example of this is the reading from the Gospel of St John chosen for the Second Sunday after Christmas. It is the same reading as is chosen for Christmas Day (personally I chose to read the Christmas Midnight Gospel again on Christmas Morning) it is quite different from the focus on the child born in the manger. Here St John writes later, and in the light of further reflection, using different language which draws on the philosophy of the age, as well as the Jewish Tradition, Old Testament writings, and already existing oral and written New Testament accounts.

So, St John writes about Jesus as the “Word” in the passage today. We are familiar with that “terminology” in the Liturgy, but it has a different meaning depending on the context. For example, we have heard recently that Pope Francis has designated the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time “The Sunday of the Word of God”, 24th January this year. The focus will be on the Holy Scripture in the life of the Church, taking forward the “Year of the Word” we have marked in 2019/2020. Here we have God “speaking” to us in the written Word and so revealing his “mind” to us.

God's Word is also “creative” as you will recall in the beginning of the Book of Genesis, the story of creation, God bringing the world into being; by His Word “God created the heavens and the earth”. St John tells us this Sunday “In the beginning was the word...through Him all things came to be.”

And, in the context of the Nativity, we hear of the Word “becoming man” in the person of Jesus, the Incarnation. St John puts it this way: “The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory”.

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In all these ways God reveals Himself to us, and at this time of course we celebrate the personal self-communication of God in Jesus Christ.

In an article Fr Charles Fox addresses the Christmas Question which he takes from the Christmas Carol “What Child is This?” It is set to one of the oldest known English melodies “Greensleeves” (late 16th Century). The lyrics come from a poem written by William Chatterton Dix, in 1865.

The first verse

*What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?*

St John, who knew Our Lord so well, would have asked himself that question, and he saw Jesus’ actions and words testifying to His being the Son of God. And in the reading for this Sunday he concludes: “No one has ever seen God; it is the Only Son, who is nearest to the Father’s heart who has made him known”.

As we begin a New Year, thinking of new beginnings, we do so reflecting on the One who truly brought about a new age, summed up in the words of another Carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” where we sing:

*“The hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight”.*

We need to take these words to heart in our own lives as we begin 2021 prioritising Jesus, The Word of God, for us, “seriously reflecting” as one writer says “engagement with the Gospels about the Word, so that we may know what it is to be human and how to achieve optimum person-hood.” (Joseph Pollard: Finding Fresh Light).

Quite a challenge, but not as daunting maybe, now that we are in the “Zoom Generation”.

Happy New Year.

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