



Fourth Week of Advent (Year C): 19th /20th December
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“His name will be called Emmanuel.”

On Christmas Eve at 5:30 I will be celebrating Mass in my former Parish St George and St Teresa. I am looking forward to it: firstly, because it will enable Fr Robert, the Parish Priest, to have an extra Mass that evening so that greater members can attend Christmas Masses which will be on a booking system due to COVID precautions. And, second because it is always special to return to celebrate Mass with parishioners who have been my Parish Family for so many years.

There is a difference though: this year there will be no Christmas Tableau with the children enacting the Christmas Story of the Birth of Jesus because the crowds who normally attend this wonderful play would be too great for safety in a time of danger of infection.

When I first went to St George and St Teresa, I found this experience very moving, bringing home the wonder of Christmas, the Birth of our Lord, so vividly. Parents were present, grandparents were there, the children, of course, came to the climax of all their preparations, a magical performance of the Christmas Story.

I noted an article in an American magazine these past few days with the title: “Christmas Pageants and School Plays are back”. So much was cancelled last year due to COVID, but now – on a more limited scale – they are back. The author commented on how the children, the performers “were content to bask in the glow of their achievement. And we are too, just like any other year.”

Speaking to a Grandmother yesterday, as I was preparing this Reflection, she told me of her granddaughter aged 4, and how she told Granny on FaceTime about her role as the Angel Gabriel. She gave Granny a demonstration of how she, the Angel, greeted Mary with arms out wide “Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.” When the demonstration was over, she asked Granny to do the same, to be the Angel. Granny, I understand, did her best; it meant so much to her to see her granddaughter so happy, and filled with the joy of what Christmas is really all about!

The readings and antiphons of the Fourth Sunday of Advent, are chosen to prepare the whole Church for the Birth of the Saviour, the Child Jesus. I remember going to Nazareth many years ago with a Priest friend. There we went to the Convent of the Little Sisters of Jesus, whose life is inspired by St Charles de Foucauld. They live very simply, and the Child Jesus is central to their spirituality. There, meditating on the simplicity of the image of the child lying before us in the little Chapel, I was especially conscious of what

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Emmanuel, God with us, means. He became one of us, God became a little child to journey with us in love.

We are told in the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday, that when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, the child within her, John the Baptist “leapt with joy” and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit; she gave a loud cry and asked “why should I be honored with a visit from the Mother of my Lord?...yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

Mary was so open to God’s will: she believed that God’s Word to her would be fulfilled. Her Faith enabled her to recognize the work of God in her people’s history and in her own life. Her openness to God allowed God to work through her so that Salvation might come to everyone. Because of this Mary is a model and symbol of the Church.

It is precisely here, in the Birth of that Child that we people of Christian Faith find the source of our values. In Him we find meaning and purpose in life. This event, together with the teaching, Death and Resurrection of Jesus change the way we look at everything.

Recently, Jordan Peterson, a world renowned clinical psychologist, was interviewed by Steven Edginton in “off script”. The title of the programme “the collapse of our values is a greater threat than climate change”. He argues that if you discard religion you still have the urge to worship, so what do you worship?”

That is why our children entering into the wonder of the Incarnation brings so much joy. It is why we reject attempts to paint out, obliterate the meaning of Christmas, by those who seek, for whatever reason, to deny our children the opportunity to enter into the Christmas story, that is at the heart of our Faith and life.

May we be like Mary, open and co-operative in God’s plan of salvation.

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