

Christmas

25th December 2017

'Touching on what it means to be human'

I was rooting through a box the other week that my Dad had brought down from the loft in their house. I am not exactly sure how many boxes of my things are in their loft, but I'm trying gradually to free them of my encumbrances! In that box I found something that I thought I had lost for ever, which was a special possession from my childhood, an exercise book wrapped in bright red metallic Christmas paper ... and in that book I had written out in longhand a couple of dozen of my favourite Christmas carols. It was so that we had all our carols in one place, for it was our tradition to sing many carols together after Christmas lunch. My grandad, a practising Anglican to the end of his long life, was also a great pianist, and would accompany the carols on the piano, as we gathered round him to sing. I'm sorry that can't show you the carols book ... it's waiting at my parents' to bring out later today at the Christmas table!

I'm sure that each of our families has happy traditions and memories of Christmases past; we each keep the festivities in our own way, don't we? But Christmas

reaches very deep in to our hearts, doesn't it? Remembrance of Christmases past, memories of those departed members of our families with whom we spent previous Christmases, thoughts of what it felt like to celebrate Christmas with such eager expectation as a child, ... these are very special to us, both emotionally and religiously. I remember how different it was to spend 5 Christmases in a row *not* with my family when I was an on-call Hospital Chaplain.

There is a profound sense, I think, that this feast of the Lord's Nativity touches on just what is most important in human life ... just what it means to be human! The whole idea that God has chosen to become man is so amazing — and yet it does make perfect sense that God in would wish to make Himself known to His beloved human creation. Or, rather, it makes sense when we have understood God's true nature. It is through the Incarnation — God taking flesh in baby Jesus — that we see God's limitless love, and deep humility. And when we have acknowledged this awesome mystery, then human life

cannot ever be the same again. Human life *can't* be the same when we really understand that the God who created the universe is willing to enter our world and our history. Christmas carries with it this *huge* weight of meaning! No wonder it is so important to us as Christians, and even spills over into the lives of non-believers with some significance ... no-one can fail to be touched by the fact (for us) — or even the possibility (for them) — that “God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son.”

The birth of Jesus, the Son of God, in a Bethlehem stable 2000yrs ago, touches on just what it means to be human. If God *the world's Creator* allowed Himself a human birth to a poor couple in a backwater of the empire, His first human habitation “a mangerful of hay,” then there are a lot of things that we as mere creatures cannot possibly get up to without great offence. We cannot posture and pretend to be the world's true masters — for we are not; we cannot treat others as inferior to ourselves — for we have all one master; we cannot store up treasures for ourselves on earth — for it is not ours in the first place, it is God's, given

us to share. We have to live as the Son of God has shown us; we have no choice if we are not to offend that great act of love in which God became man to lead us back to God.

God has reached deep into our human lives as He has chosen to be born into our race, in simplicity, and in all things but sin. He enjoyed celebrations, He enjoyed feasts, ... but He most of all enjoyed meeting those whose lives were full of faith. How many times was Our Lord moved to say, “Your faith has saved you”? So as we give time to each other today, as we share gifts and meals together, let's make sure that above all we give faith, strengthen belief, build up one another and especially our children, through prayer and love. If we want to be known as Christians, then we have to live Christmas every day — every day should be the season of peace and goodwill, not just 1day/yr! As we sing out our carols, here at Mass, and maybe gathered as families after lunch, let's make sure that we mean with our hearts what we sing with our lips! *Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray ... And fit us for heaven to live with Thee, there.*