

Homily: Christmas 2020

A couple of days ago I watched an old film version of 'a Christmas Carol', the famous story in which Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by ghosts, who show him the real meaning of Christmas – and, we could say, of life – and enable him to change his ways. Scrooge goes from being a miserable and miserly man to a man of great love and generosity, and a man who is no longer unhappy, but instead filled with joy. When he wakes on Christmas morning, a reformed man and happy to be alive, Scrooge feels like life has just begun again for him. In his own words: "I'm as light as a feather, I'm as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy". And he dances around like an excited child on Christmas morning. The change in Scrooge is not just a moral reform – he goes from being bad to good – but also a transformation of spirit – he is filled with joy, renewed. The whole experience brings out the child in him. His adult responsibilities, his business and his money-making are no longer the most important thing – he sees something more in life.

I'm sure that Charles Dickens shows this partly because he understood something that's true for all adults – that Christmas brings out something of the child in us. Most of us can look back on happy memories of Christmas and relive something of our childhood; many of us have a few days when we try to forget some of our day to day business and simply enjoy life, away from many of our adult responsibilities. We may wear paper hats or slightly ridiculous Christmas jumpers. Christmas brings out the child in us. But it also does something more – much more. It also brings out the child in God.

Today God is made visible on earth. The face of God is seen for the first time. And it is the face of a tiny child, a new-born. And already the work of Jesus has begun. He came to earth to save us, and by accepting our human nature He has already begun the work of salvation. He came to reveal God to us, and even as a child He shows us God. When He cries, He shows us the God who suffers with us and for us; when He laughs, He shows us the God who shares our joys. When He is hungry or wants attention, He shows us the God who yearns for our love. And He also shows us a God who is not a threat to us. What could be less threatening than a baby? Here is God in our midst, and we may come before Him in awe and wonder, as we may do before any new life – but especially this one. But we never come before Him with anything to fear. In Jesus, God came to earth in the smallest possible way to make Himself acceptable to us, to teach us not to be afraid of Him, but to show Him love.

We're invited to look upon the nativity scene at Christmas. Here in the church, in our homes, on Christmas cards – anywhere where we see a representation of this scene, we are called to contemplate this wonderful mystery. God is with us. And as we look, we see Jesus in need of shelter, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, sheltered by the walls of a stable and the animals around Him. He is watched over by Mary and Joseph. And in every part of this story, we find people watching over others. We find shepherds on the hillside watching over their sheep; we find angels watching over the shepherds. Mary and Joseph have gone to Bethlehem to be registered, because there is a census of the known world. Caesar is watching over his empire. And in the midst of it all, the child, with Mary

and Joseph caring for Him. But the strange truth is this: the Child is really the One watching over all of us. This tiny, unthreatening presence in our midst: this is God, who holds the whole universe in His hands. God whose love does not allow Him to stay distant, and to watch over us from afar, but instead drives Him to come and live amongst His people, to share our very lives. We don't need to wait for Jesus to speak for Him to reveal God to us: look at the manger, look at the infant, know that He holds us in love – there we find God.

Fr Andrew

