

From the Deacon's Desk

Christmas Decorations Work-Bee:

This Sunday after the 9:30 am Mass, we will have a work-bee for all parishioners, especially families with children, to decorate objects that will be used on our banners during the Christmas Season. Each and every time you come to church, you'll be reminded through your personal and individually decorated ornament, that God knows you each by name and appreciates the individual talents and gifts you bring to this community of faith. It will only take about ten minutes of your time, so come to the hall after Mass to make your mark.

First Reconciliation:

Last Thursday our second grade children, along with their families, celebrated penance for the first time. These families started preparing for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation, and Eucharist last September. Beginning in January they will focus on Confirmation and Eucharist which will lead to the celebration of Confirmation with Bishop Cistone next April, and First Communion with us in May. Please continue to keep these families in your prayers, and encourage them if you see them around the parish.

Advent Season:

As we make our way into the first part of the Advent Season, it's important to step back and examine why we celebrate this season with its various meanings in the first place. I have always found it interesting that Advent comes at an "out of sync" time of the year. It doesn't fit the normal pattern with everything else we know in life—the academic semester, the fiscal year, the twelve month calendar, the cycle of the sports seasons—and it is the beginning of the new Church Year. Advent seems to be slightly off with everything else in our practical world. Does this fact remind us that for people of faith, we are invited to live "out of sync" with the rest of the world? I think so.

Of course Advent helps us prepare for the memory celebration of the central truth of Christianity; namely, that God became one of us through the incarnation of Jesus. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clarifies that we do not see the Incarnated Christ as **part** God and **part** human (as if Jesus had a split identity). Rather, we are taught that "He became truly man while remaining truly God." (CCC 464)

I am often amazed that when I deal with the topic of the incarnation and that Jesus became one of us, deep down people don't really believe it. They profess that belief in the Creed, but somewhere deep down few really believe it completely.

When the Church teaches that Jesus was truly human, the Church teaches that he was like us in all things except sin. In other words, whereas you and I sometimes get lost and act selfishly or against God's desire for us, Jesus never did that. Someone once said that Jesus was the perfect image of what humanity is capable of becoming, and in him we are able to see God and to understand his feelings toward us.

The Jesus I have come to know personally, like me, sometimes struggled to follow God. He suffered like all human beings do, and he questioned, and if being **really human** means not knowing the future, then Jesus did not have divine foreknowledge either. Perhaps that is why when he was asked when the end of the world would come, Jesus responded with: "Only the Father knows this."

At the Second Vatican Council, and in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), the council fathers wrote: “The son of God...worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.” (GS, no. 22)

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was tempted in the desert. If Jesus were not fully human, how could there have been real temptations, because God can't be tempted. So who was being tempted in the desert? A fully human Jesus, who was equally God, was being tempted in the desert.

The sacred scriptures tell us that Jesus “emptied himself” at the incarnation. This does not mean that the Son stopped being God at the incarnation, only that while Jesus was in his human body, he was emptied of divine certitude.

I once received a thank you note from an elderly woman in an RCIA class who was approaching her 80th birthday, and this is what the note said: “Thank you for helping me see Jesus in a new light. I have always been a believer, but Jesus seemed a little remote to me. I now see him as much more alive and real.”

Why on earth would God want to be human:

The mystery of the incarnation is not that God could become one of us – the inexplicable part is how God could give his love away so freely to his people, without expectation or condition. Why would an infinite power want to limit himself within the confines of history and a human body? Why incarnation?

There is a marvelous story in the book *The Holy Longing* which tells about a four-year-old child who awoke one night frightened, convinced that in the darkness around her there were all kinds of spooks and monsters. Alone, she ran to her parents' bedroom. Her mother calmed her down and, taking her by the hand, led her back to her own room, where she put on a light and reassured the child with these words: “You needn't be afraid, you are not alone here. God is in the room with you.” The child replied: “I know God is here, but I need someone in this room who has some skin!”

In essence, that story gives us the reason for the incarnation. God takes on flesh because, like the young girl, we all need someone with us who has some skin. A God who is everywhere is just as easily nowhere. We believe in what we can touch, see, hear, smell, and taste, and I often remind people that the Church's sacraments are things that “put flesh on God.”

We have five senses and we are present to the world through those senses. We communicate through them, are open to each other and the world only through them. And God, having created our nature, respects how it operates. In the incarnation (a word which takes its root from the Latin word *carnus*, meaning physical flesh), God became physical because we are creatures of the senses who, at one point need a God with some skin.

Unlike other believers in God, we Christians believe in a God who is also physically present on this earth inside of human beings, especially Jesus. The Christian God isn't just transcendent (in heaven) but can be seen, heard, and touched. The Christian God has some skin.

For me personally, Jesus is the life of God lived out in the human arena. It is the kind of life that removes the barriers that impede others and calls them to abundant living. This divine and human life in Jesus has but one ultimate purpose, namely, to invite you and me into the fullness of our own lives.

As we journey beyond the halfway point of our Advent season, let us pray that God will live within our humanity more and more each day.