

"You founded the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish but you remain (...) you are the same, and your years never end." I am amazed we find today in our readings this text from the letter to the Hebrews, because the first thing I feel like saying after hearing John's famous Prologue *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* is that God will never be the same. Stepping out into the darkness and coming to inhabit the world with us, God will never be the same for us human beings, and maybe we even dare thinking: entering human experience, God will never be the same inside of God's very being. At any rate, something happened in our world that will never "un-happen". Something has been done that will never be undone. God has broken in and this is the heart of Christmas' message and of the very unique Christian faith: *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*.

Yet what does it mean for us exactly?

Well, I am afraid that most of the time, we get the message literally, believing that Jesus would be like a word inside a body. Most of us don't believe anymore, as some of the first Christians did, that God took the appearance of a human, like the ancient gods at times did playfully. No, we believe that God did not play any tricks on us. We know that Jesus worked, loved, suffered. He died like any of us. We believe he was real. Yet in spite of all, most of the time, we still see Jesus as a word inside a human body, meaning: Jesus was for God a way to convey a message.

Human beings are not very good with words. Words don't mean a lot to us. I learned recently that actually 90% of our daily communications are not made of words, but body language and inflections of the voice. One of the reasons we have so many misunderstandings when we exchange texts and emails. To communicate we need to use our bodies, gestures, facial expressions, they help us "get it". And so when it comes to theology, this is what we believe: that for centuries God spoke with words, but it was so abstract and we were so clueless that at some point God had to send Jesus to make it clearer. But even believing so, we keep trying to find the words, message or even the wisdom behind Jesus. We look at Jesus's life or we listen to Jesus' parables and we wonder: What does it mean? What information is God trying to convey?

And this is how we generally miss the point because of course, there is no message behind the story, like if we could find something bigger than Jesus that Jesus was bringing. There is nothing to be found bigger than Jesus. And so the message is not behind the story, the message is the story, the message is that God is with us, inside the story and this is what John's Prologue is telling us today. This is the very essence of the Gospel: God did not come in the flesh to teach us, to make an example, or even to save us if by salvation we understand some sort of rescue operation. God came into the flesh to be with us, to embrace us, to unite Godself to us.

Something happened in our world that will never "un-happen". Something has been done that will never be undone. And the important thing to remember is that even if it happened in History, this is not something we look at in the past. We know that baby Jesus became the risen Christ who is always with us. *The word made flesh* does not only mean: "Once upon a time, there was a man named Jesus who was God". It means that God has entered human experience, and very likely the experience of every living being, to never leave it again. God is present in our flesh. Christmas' message is that God is not an abstraction. God cannot be expressed with words on paper, or even on scrolls. 90% of human communication are not words for the main reason that in the end we don't really care about information. As a famous psychologist puts it, whether for love, acceptance or power the real question we keep asking ourselves and each others is: Do I matter? Do I make a difference? To which God answers in Jesus: It makes such a difference to me that nothing in the world will ever be the same anymore.

And yet. Yet we keep on seeing God as distant. I was reading in the few past weeks a famous Christian best seller and there was this chapter where the author says: at some point in your life you will have temptations or trials and it's a test and God is going to watch you to see how you deal with it. Well, not only I find it a bit scary and not very helpful, but mainly I don't think this is theologically true. What John's Gospel tells us today is that certainly God is not up in the heavens watching and judging, but God is not even a something to be found somewhere in our bodies or even in our hearts. What the Gospel says is that the very essence of God is woven to us in our flesh, God is living this life of us, God is living through us as this life God is.

Speaking of trials, I heard once this amazing story of a woman who said, the day she was found with a stomach cancer: *I am curious to find out what God is going to do with it. I am curious to find out what God is going to do with it.* Well, I think she really had a sense that God was not watching from above, separated from her, but that God was living this life of her inside of her. Instead of looking at the past, at her faults, at her fate, asking the universal question: *Why do you punish me?* She turned to the future to see what God was going to do with her disease, because she believed that God could act with her, transform her, as God is always transforming the world, making all the difference in the world, if we we let God be God through us.

God is life, John says. God is your own very and precious life when you receive God to become God's very own, God's child.

I think it really means we need to invite God in every situation, as God did invite Godself in Jesus. But it's so hard to receive God. It's hard not because we are bad people wired to reject God, it's hard because of our shame and guilt, of our sense of meaninglessness. Because we believe so hard that God is watching us, we all want to look good or important in front of God. Just look at what we do for Christmas: we all long for beautiful and holy. Yet, it's not all there is to our stories, but the shame and the pain we rarely invite God in it. And this how sin kills us. Sin does not kill us because it is sin, but because it's the part of ourselves we keep away from God. The part we don't want God to have anything to do with. And so God cannot do anything with it, and then maybe at some point God cannot do anything with us anymore.

Yet what the Gospel tells us today is that God is not afraid of darkness. *The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.* Our darkness are not necessarily terrible secrets. Most of the time, the darkness John refers to is the darkness of the thickness of the flesh, tissue upon tissue, the ignorance of our own complexity, layer upon layer of consciousness. 90% of our experience we are unable to name, these things that never surface and make us think thoughts and do things that leave us perplexed or amazed or horrified with ourselves.

Yet this is from the darkness of the womb that Jesus came into the world, as in the beginning it's from the chaos that everything was created. This is from our own darkness that God comes to bring life and light to us.

God has entered human experience. God can enter any kind of human experience. Rowan Williams said: *Christmas means that God has become unbearably close.* In Jesus, God has made an eternal covenant between God and humankind. There is no undo function. God has happened to us. It means that everything can matter, everything can make sense, everything can be full of glory, glory meaning *heavy* in Hebrew, everything in our lives is meant to be unbearably loaded with God and actually, everything human can only really make sense if it's bigger than human. We are stuck with God and God is stuck with us. It's wonderful and terrifying like the birth of a child or like falling in love, some days it may feel unbearable like a cancer in the stomach. But it's something we cannot get rid of as long as we are in this world: It's life.

God is to be found by living our lives to the full: not by accumulating experiences, but by going deep. Individually and as a community, something is done through our lives that will never be undone, something happens that will never "un-happen". Something is brought to being that will never die. We are becoming God's children.

The reason we come to church is not to find God, because God would be in the church. We come to church for communion, to share our experiences in love and truth and to put a language on this strange adventure we call life. In Jesus, we see and understand how God comes to life in a human being, how God becomes the very life of a human being. We come to church to understand what's happening to us. How God is happening to us. Julian of Norwich once said *God is everything good that happens to me.* And when we become children of God and open our lives to God we know that everything can be made good, as God did with the cross. Because no matter how thick the darkness, God is always the same of course, God always brings light and life, and God can always bring the best in us and out of us. Amen.