

Homily for December 25, 2000
Christmas 2000 Cycle C

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 9:1-6
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:1-14

We find God in unexpected places

The swaddling clothes are too ordinary, the stable so common, the straw inelegant; the animals make noise and they smell. And those characters! First, the three shepherds were practically considered akin to bandits. Carpenters were associated with the peasant class, and Mary was only a girl – a teenager! And who would have thought that God would come as a tiny child? Christ could have conquered all, had he come in power. But Christmas reveals that the only power with which Christians may conquer the world is the power of love – and that is so hard a place to be at times.

Christmas asks that we see God in unexpected places. Lest we forget, this very night Scrooge flattered Marley's ghost, "You were always a good man of business, Jacob." This causes the ghost to shriek, "Business!! Humanity was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business!!" Marley finally saw where God was located, but too late to make a difference.

In his last Christmas Eve homily, Archbishop Oscar Romero said, "We must not seek the Child Jesus only in the pretty figures of our Christmas cribs. We must seek him among the undernourished who have gone to bed tonight without eating, among the poor news boys who will sleep covered with newspapers in doorways." Christmas enables us to see God in the most unexpected places. Christmas takes the world seriously and everything in it, including the bleary-eyed and the unshaven. A poem written back in 1909 says, "Every child on earth is holy, every crib is a manger lowly, every home is a stable dim, every kind word is a hymn, every star is God's own gem and every town is Bethlehem."

We long for that world where we discover God in everything and in everyone. The miracle of Christmas is that God could love us enough to become one of us, that he would humble himself to take on our humanity and transform the human condition in his holiness. As St. Augustine preached: "God loved us so much that he who made time entered time for our sake; he who is an eternity older than the world became younger in the world than many of his servants; he who made humanity became human. He became a creature through a mother he had created, he was carried in arms he made, he nursed at breasts he had formed.

From his crib arose in his infant cries the Word of God,
without whom all human eloquence falls mute.”

For some here today one unexpected place to
encounter God could be in church and with this
community of faith. We're sorry if anyone associated
with the Church or with this parish has caused you
pain. If God can be found in a baby in a manger, in
the poor, in the downtrodden, then God can be found
even here in bread and wine and one another. Do
come back.

The poet Carl Sandburg once wrote, “A child is
God's opinion that the world should continue.” Indeed,
on this feast, a child is God's opinion that the world is
headed in the right direction after all.

We find God in unexpected places.