

December 31, 2006

By Father Charles Bowes

1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

Psalm 84:2-3, 5-6, 9-10

1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

Luke 2:41-52

The experience of a holy family is as close as our own.

Have you seen them – in the pictures in the newspapers, in the news magazines, in the newscasts of CNN and CBS? Have you seen them – in the images coming into our homes from a backward country, a faraway land?

Have you seen them walking along the sides of the veiled women, the beasts of burden, the children covered with dust and making their way to refugee camps to live in tents pitched upon a barren landscape? Have you seen them?

Who am I talking about? I'm talking about a man by the name of Joseph of the House of David, and a woman named Mary of the Village of Nazareth. Not Afghans. Not Muslims. Not Pakistanis. Rather, a family you and I know very well. Have you seen them?

Surely you've seen them...seen at least a momentary reflection of their faces among the refugees on the news, caught a glimpse of them among the throngs of the fearful, the hard-pressed, the displaced. You might have seen them, as I have, a lot closer to home. Sensed their anxious concern among the tense and worried faces in the corridors of nursing homes, or in the waiting rooms of hospitals. Or perhaps in a courtroom – a father wincing at the sight of his son in shackles, a mother

crying at the announcement of a sentence of death?

They are there. Believe me, they are there. I've seen them again and again. Usually unnoticed, but present nonetheless – Joseph and Mary – different names, same experience.

Mary and Joseph and who knows how many other saints, unseen but present in the conflicts of our world, in the crises of our lives, silent witnesses to the yearning of every human heart for peace...for justice. Urgently longing for an end to poverty and despair and sickness and punishment and crime and war. Have you seen them – Joseph of the House of David, Mary from the Village of Nazareth? In the push and shove of today's world?

Each time we Christians enter our churches during these holy days, we declare to the whole world our belief, our firm conviction that, at a certain point in history, the one and only God entered into the constraints of space and time, was clothed in human skin, felt the warmth of a mother's love. Our very God took on flesh, took teeth and then took tools into his hands and worked for a living, rejoiced at wedding receptions, cried at the death of a friend, fed those who were hungry, healed the sick and raised the dead.

In this holy season we celebrate the doctrine called the Incarnation. The teaching wherein we proclaim the mystery of God entering into human flesh

– the doctrine from which flows our conviction that there is nothing...nothing in this world that escapes the loving embrace of God.

So, have you seen any sign of them? Have you seen the compassion of Mary in the eyes of a mother in a refugee camp or in a hospital room, worried over the welfare of her child? Have you seen some sign of that man named Joseph at work in the strenuous efforts of a father struggling to provide for his family while working at some dead-end job? A dad trying his best to protect his family, not from the clutches of Herod, but from the corrosive influence of drugs? Have you seen them? On news footage? At the place where you work? At that place you call home? Have you seen a sign of Joseph, a reflection of Mary? Living with us? Praying for us? Bringing us into the deep embrace of God whose tears flow as those of a mother, whose grip is as desperate as that of a father?

Let us pray: You sanctify us around two tables, here and at home, and you nourish us with love, God among us. Enable us to understand the holiness of family life even in its imperfections, for we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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