

## Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 27th January –

### He is my son; he takes after me.

**The Son ... united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary (238) She treasures the entire life of Jesus in her heart. 'Son of God, Jesus, you were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother, you became part of this earth ... Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory ...' (LS 241, 246; End-Prayer 2)**

A key foundational core of Christianity is the humanity of Jesus Christ. This is the (shocking) heart of the faith for the Catholic Christian – that Jesus was utterly and totally an 'ordinary' human being. Without this historical moment there would be no Christian faith or church or scriptures, nor could this encyclical have been written. 'Jesus,' mused Pope Francis, 'worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?"' (LS 98; see also *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II, 22). The Pope understands this truth as the central source of Christian revelation, and endeavours to highlight it throughout the encyclical, pointing out the sublime role of Mary in ensuring the 100 per cent humanity of Jesus – and therefore of God.

Mothers and their babies. What a human/divine mystery! What a real moment of uniquely human experience. While the orthodox teaching of the virgin birth lies at the core of so many Christian doctrines, the actual reality of that birth, for the baby to be genuinely human, would have revealed a very anxious, messy scene, untidy and unrehearsed. Maybe we need more images of a bawling, bloody infant struggling to find its breath, squeezing its eyes against the new light. The challenge here is to keep the doctrinal meaning in balance with the visceral experience of heart and gut. After all, it is Incarnation – a painful fleshing. It does seem strange that this unique moment of 'being human,' of that most intense, tender and poignant experience of a mother and baby in the mystery of raw birth, is not perennially recaptured and celebrated in our incarnational, liturgical worship. God becomes a baby in the way of all babies, when human blood, flesh and seed are consecrated as the raw material for the birth of God.

How much of our mothers' essential soul and spirit do we catch off them when we're very small, how much of their light and shadow? And how much are mothers aware of the unique and divine mystery they incarnate in their offspring? 'Once a woman has carried her baby inside her body for nine months and brought it forth through the pain of childbirth,' writes Richard Rohr, 'she knows something about mystery, about miracles, and about transformation that men will never know.' Hans Urs von Balthasar, theologian of beauty and favourite of Pope Benedict, tries to describe this human/divine dynamic:

'After a mother has smiled for a long time at her child, the child will begin to smile back. She has awakened love in its heart, and in this awakening love, she awakens also recognition.' This is how Jesus was made aware of joy and love – and thus of God. All utterly through his mother. The divine sonship of Jesus had very human beginnings. And the poet Rainer Maria Rilke believed that an infant's journey into human awareness depended on the beckoning, beguiling voice of the mother, 'easing the child into self-hood, lessening the shadows of the abyss that trap us in inarticulate darkness.'

As with all mothers Mary would have carried, formed and nourished Jesus for nine months in her womb. How much of her very being would have been visible in him? Working, eating, sleeping, Mary was forming Jesus' body from her own – his features, his limbs and his human/divine powers. Did he have her colouring, her eyes, her smile, her way of walking? Would the neighbours have said, 'For sure, that's Mary's boy – just look at the freckles on his nose.' Atheist Jean Paul Sartre imagines Mary looking at her newborn son and thinking,

'This God is my son. The divine flesh is my flesh. He is made from me. He has my eyes, and the shape of his mouth is the shape of mine. He takes after me. He is God, and he takes after me. No other woman has ever had her God fall to her lot in this way. A small God whom I can take in my arms and cover with kisses. A warm God who breathes and smiles. A God who lives and whom I can touch.' Holding him and gazing at him with tender power she sowed the seeds of an immense courage in his heart. Was it through his mother that he experienced the security, intimacy and tender feminine energy that empowered his divine ministry? And at that last moment on the cross, bereft and hopeless, did his desperate eyes catch the quiet intensity in his mother's uplifted face, and did those memories once again burn through his despair and bless his breaking heart?

The human love of Jesus was the divine love of God. So is ours. His forgiveness was the forgiveness of God. So is ours. How did Jesus know this? He knew it because of his mother. He drank in that wisdom with her milk. It was on her lap that his 'inner authority' was nurtured. His capacity for intimate relationships began with the gaze of delight between him and his mother as he guzzled greedily at her breast. Later, when his fear terrified him, it was his mother's eyes he remembered; when his doubts unbalanced him, it was her touch that restored his trust, and when the devil bedazzled him, it was her warm embrace that renewed his confidence. Let mothers tell us about Incarnation..

(An Astonishing Secret pp199-201)