

We are People of the Flesh - Week Beginning 15th June

'God became human so that humans could become God.' Even though this beautiful truth was first expressed and believed during the early years of Christianity, most of us today have a different understanding of the incarnation. At a huge cost to our quality of life, we have lost sight of this initial and exciting revelation. For some strange and shadowy reason the amazing mystery of the fleshing of the Word gradually became centred on a tougher, legalistic kind of transaction between god and a fallen race. Even today, redemption is generally regarded as a kind of rescue operation by God – a desperate last-ditch effort from outside to salvage a world gone adrift. The death of God's son was part of the terrible bargain. When the core of Christianity is based on such narrow, sin-centred motivations, then the consequences are immense and, too often, quite destructive . . .

Over the centuries the whole point of the divine-human union has so often been misrepresented or even seriously missed. Instead of 'locating' god at the heart of God's creation, there is a persistence about maintaining the separation between the divine and the human, between grace and nature. Also, there are far-reaching implications for our understanding of church and sacraments and of our interpretation of many doctrines and teachings, when we rediscover some lost insights into the love and meaning at the heart of incarnation . . .

Revelation is the amazing love story of God's desire to be intimately among us in human form. Full of intense compassion, God wished to create out of pure love, and then, in time, to become that creation. That becoming happened in Jesus Christ. In him it was revealed that god's heart beats in all our hearts, that all our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, that every creature is a divine work of art. How different that is to the awful picture painted for some of us of the angry god in search of vengeance!

Revelation is now seen to be about the beauty of being human since humanity is the 'raw material', so to speak, of God's presence in the world. Revelation is about the graced possibilities of humanity, graced at its centre from the very beginning. It is about God's desire to be known and loved in the humanity of Jesus Christ. It is about god's delight in being visible and tangible in human form. This is how it became possible for God to be close to us, to share completely in the experiences of creatures, the fruit of God's own womb. We can say with saints and theologians from the time of Christ, that the incarnation happened not because creation went wrong at some early stage, but because in God's plan to share God's own divine joy with others, creation was first necessary so that incarnation could take place. I hope that this does not sound complicated.

Think of a married couple. Out of their mutual love they conceive a child into whom they will pour their deepest care and affection. The child is 'full' of its parents, grown from the seed of their love, nourished in the womb of the mother, bearing its parents' image, reflecting so much of their personalities. The child is a kind of image of its parents. So too, in this renewed way of looking at the meaning of creation and incarnation, we are, in St Paul's words, 'copies of the glorious body of Christ', a kind of rough draft of the shape of God. In the Office of Readings there is a gentle exhortation in a sermon of St Leo the Great; 'O Christian heart, recognise the great worth of the wisdom that is yours, so that the creator may be shown forth in the creature and that, in the mirror of your heart as in the lines of a portrait, the image of god may be reflected.' (Vol 3, p510) . . .

All of this we have tumbled to in the revelation that is Jesus. Now we know that all humanity is heading towards divinity. You and I are growing into God, as the mystics put it. In fact all of creation is already sacred, and reveals something of the glory and splendour of God. That is why we say that the event of incarnation has ended all dualism. Heaven and earth are forever mysteriously intertwined since the Word became flesh. And deep in our own inner being the kingdom of God forms an intrinsic part of our true nature. (Treasured and Transformed pp121, 122, 123)