

2. Week beginning 7th December 2014

The Power of a Baby

It was 11.45 pm on Christmas Eve. Everything was ready – except the homily! Our Church had fallen down, literally. We were trying to keep our parish family together in the school hall. The day was spent in taking care of the essentials – finding an ordinary table for a makeshift altar, replacing infant chairs with ones big enough for well-padded adults, coaxing the caretaker for adequate heating, extra lighting for the partially sighted, making space, amid the clutter, for readers and Eucharistic ministers to manoeuvre, finding a piano and a microphone that worked.

As we started Mass, I was blaming myself for not having a homily prepared. When the assembled parishioners came to their feet for the gospel, I noticed a tiny baby, not more than a few days old, asleep in her mother's arms. An idea hit me. I spoke briefly about the Almighty Creator and Judge that we worshipped and feared. 'How frightening would it be ; I asked, 'if this omniscient God thundered into our world just now?' I stooped to lift aloft the small child, no bigger than my fist. 'There, ' I said, 'there is the power of God. Who can be afraid of a God like that?'

When you think about it, a baby is an amazing symbol of both power and powerlessness. Or, perhaps more accurately, power within powerlessness. As I felt the totally trusting baby stir sleepily in my hands I thought about her vulnerability, her total trust. How ambiguous and paradoxical it all was. And how shocking, too. This is what love does. It gives away its power. It renders itself destructible. All of this runs against the grain of our competitive and controlling nature. How can weakness ever be understood as the secret of true love? With every birth we ask ourselves the same question . . .

But that is what love is like. It surrenders. It has no more masks, no more expectations, no more certainties. The Bethlehem baby's defenceless presence, his shocking and precarious weakness, his over-turning of all our ideas about the nature of God, stun us into silence. It is this sacred silence, during these few precious days, that the hard thoughts within us can soften, that the unforgiving walls of judgement and blame can crumble, that the cold shadows of our pride can be melted by the warmth of a baby's smile. Such is the power of a baby.

(Already Within pp 133, 134)