

I am sure that I informed you last Sunday that the feast of the Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas) that we celebrated, signified that the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany were now well and truly over. So what has happened today? Our lectionary compilers have presented us with the great Gospel of Christmas! Like the message of Christmas itself, this is indeed a mystery. Perhaps they thought that John 1 was too 'heavy' to take in on Christmas morning. Or perhaps they wanted us to continue with the themes of light that feature strongly during Christmas and Epiphany, before we enter the more subdued season of Lent. However, we can never really get away from the good news of the glory, the light, that Christ brought into the world as we journey in worship through the Christian year. Even in the darker days of Lent when we consider the cost of God's initiative in Christ, when we journey spiritually with him to the cross of suffering, we can always see the light of resurrection glory shining beyond it.

The first words of our Gospel reading remind us of the first words of the Bible: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' The Gospel introduces us to the concept of God the Word, capital W, from the Greek word 'Logos.' John and the Greek-speaking world found this term useful in trying to explain the creative activity of God. God the Word means God as God has revealed God-self in the universe, and in a way that we can receive and understand, even if only dimly. We refer to the Bible as 'the word of God.' Yet John is telling us that the creation itself is the supreme revelation of the Word of God. St Paul agrees. In his first chapter to the Romans, he writes: 'Ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made.' (Romans 1: 20)

The Franciscans teach that the creation is the 'first Bible' written billions of years before the books we call the Bible. This suggests that 'everything visible, without exception, is the outpouring of God, and that Christ is a word for the divine creative activity, as John tells us, 'Through him all things came into being, and not one thing had its being except through him.' (John 1: 3) ¹

There is a cautionary lesson here for us as we face climate change and human abuse of our planet. An understanding of the Christ mystery as outlined in our readings today should inform us how very sinful is the human ravaging of our

earthly home, the very place we stand on and that gives us life. We Christians for the most part have not taken this world seriously because our notion of God and salvation did not include or honour the physical universe. But if we understand that the creation is itself an outpouring, a sign and sacrament of the presence and love of God, we will surely be inspired to change our thinking and, hopefully, our ways. ²

We human beings are a very important part of the creation. We too are incarnate forms of the presence of God, whether we are aware of it or not. The coming of Jesus was God's initiative for enabling humanity to understand its divine calling and destiny. John's almost startling declaration is that the Word who was with God and is God 'became flesh,' came to live among us in the person of a certain Jesus of Nazareth. In him God's glory, God's presence was revealed, though not everyone was able to see it, and not able to accept him.

In Jesus we see God, but we have perhaps turned Jesus too much into an article of belief and an object of worship rather than an example to follow. Jesus' call was always, 'follow me.' Jesus is the key to our true humanity, our identity as children of God. By following him we learn how to be God-like, to be loving, compassionate, selfless. We enable his words, his values, his life, to be more and more incarnated in our lives, so that he may continue to have a visible presence in the world. We are the Body of Christ on earth now, his very flesh and blood through which to touch and heal and bless others, and to care for the world, creature and creation, that God has made and loves very much.

We come together today, as always, as the children of God, to this Eucharist, to be encouraged, nourished and renewed in our human yet divine vocation – to be Christ's Body, Christ's visible presence in the world, with the hope, the intention that everyone else may come to share this identity, because in reality there is not a single soul alive who is not possessed by the Christ. The only problem is that many or most are not aware of it. We have the awesome responsibility of showing them the way. We are to be Christ's light to those with whom we relate and ensure that we are not obstacles for them to stumble over.

As Christ-ones, Christians, we must recognize that we ourselves are the most important evidence for the reality and love of God. We ourselves are the only Bible many will read. We, the Church, and even God, will be assessed and judged according to the way we live and speak and behave. By being open to God's grace and love, striving to follow Jesus faithfully every day, we help to ensure that the Word of God that took flesh in Jesus continues to be present, visible, and active in the world. Through him and with him and by living in him we can do our part to enhance the coming of the kingdom of justice, love, and peace that Jesus came to promote and demonstrate, that the whole of humanity may find life in all its fullness as God created and called it to be.

(¹ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, p.13; ²cf p. 46)