



Homily for the annual Carol Service at Cardiff Cathedral

17 December 2017

St. David's Cathedral, Cardiff

Archbishop George Stack

You might be surprised that there are three non-scripture readings during our Cathedral Carol Service today. The one from St. Francis of Assisi is probably understandable. The one from Pope Leo the Great is quite lyrical. The one from Archbishop Oscar Romero is, perhaps, a little puzzling. Who was he for a start? He was the Archbishop of San Salvador in the 1970's. A shy, timid man, it was thought he wouldn't confront the military government which was exploiting the poor of that country. But, in the name of Jesus, he denounced the killings of innocent people trying to improve their poverty-stricken lives. He knew he himself would be a target one day. He said: *"You can tell these people that if they succeed in killing me that I forgive and bless them. Hopefully they will realise they are wasting their time. A bishop will die, but the church of God, which is the people, will never die"*.

On 24 March 1980, he was celebrating Mass in the chapel of a hospital. During the Sacrifice of the Mass, shots rang out from the gallery and he was killed by a bullet in the heart. It is recognised that the military and the government were behind the killing. So, his words we heard today are very special:

"Along with you, brothers and sisters, I too need to receive the good tidings. As a shepherd, I must announce it, but as a shepherd, I must also be one of those shepherds of Bethlehem and receive from the angels the news that stirs our hearts. ... the more poor and detached from ourselves, the more full of troubles and problems we are, the more bewildering life's ways, all the more we look up to the skies and hear the good news "A Saviour is born to you".

On this Third Sunday of Advent, the Church asks us to think about the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that the Spirit of God had overshadowed her and she was chosen to be the Mother of God. Extraordinary when you think about it. The words of Oscar Romero describe her perfectly: *"... the more full of problems and troubles we are, the more bewildering life's ways, all the more we need to look to the skies and hear"*. A Saviour is born to you". Despite all the wonderful works of art portraying the

annunciation, we are told Mary “wondered” about these things. Could that word “wonder” describe her terror and amazement after the Annunciation? Would anyone believe her that the child she was bearing was not that of another man? Could Joseph possibly accept that what she said was true? Could she bring herself to say “An angel visited me and asked me to be the Mother of God’s Son?”. She escapes to her cousin Elizabeth for three months. Elizabeth is sympathetic, but Mary has to go back to her own community which might reject her as an immoral woman. Perhaps that was why there was no room for them at the inn?

No wonder in many pictures of the annunciation and of the nativity there are reminders of suffering and sacrifice – doves above the baby, a ladder leaning against the hayloft as though leaning on the cross. A bag of gold, not far removed from the thirty pieces of silver. A cup lying overturned, its contents spilled, the redeemers blood.

It is only when we recognise Jesus as Saviour hanging on the wood of the Cross that we can kneel in front of him and adore the baby born in the wood of the crib. Mary pondered these things in her heart. *“The more full of troubles and problems we are, the more bewildering life’s ways, all the more we need to look up into the skies and hear the good news: A Saviour has been born for you”*.