



Homily for Mass of Christmas Day

Christmas Day 2018

St. David's Cathedral, Cardiff

Archbishop George Stack

You might be disappointed at not hearing the Christmas story at Mass this morning. We had the first part of St. Luke's nativity story at the Midnight Mass last night, and the second part at the Dawn Mass in Cardiff prison this morning. The gospels of Luke and Matthew "tell the story" of the nativity. At this the third Mass of Christmas we listen to St. John. He gives the meaning behind the story. *"In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God"*.

"In the beginning". Not "Once upon a time". Thanks to the work of the Hadron Collider in Cern, we are now hearing that there may be parallel universes. We may have discovered pluriverses, no longer just a universe. Told even that the "Big Bang" may well not have happened. And that "Rainbow Gravity" suggests that the universe stretches back through black holes into time - infinitely. Don't worry, I don't understand it either! But *"In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. Without him was not anything made that was made"*. Science tries to answer the question 'how'. Faith answers the question 'why'.

"The Word" means many things for St. John. Here it means Jesus - God among us in our flesh. The Greek word is logos – and John wanted to translate the message of Jesus from the Jewish world to that of the Greek philosophers and thinkers. Logos is the meaning which underlies everything. Geology –

the logos of the natural world. Psychology – the logos of the mind. Anthropology - the logos of humanity. Who can forget Maureen Lipman as the Jewish grandmother in the British Telecom advertisement of yesteryear, comforting her grandson with his sociology GCSE by telling him “at least you’ve got an ology”.

In his gospel, John is speaking of something infinitely more than ten million light years away, infinitely beyond the furthest whispers of the universe. Springing out of the very heart of God, the deepest thought in the mind of God, the creative wisdom of God, the pulse of His life and love “*revealed on earth, a child, for me*” as John Betjeman so beautifully puts it. Jesus himself. In Jesus, God our Creator the source, origin and end of our living and dying is among us.

Just one-line later John offers another amazing thought: “*In the Word was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness. A light the darkness could not comprehend*”. Comprehend means the darkness did not understand the light. And still doesn’t. It also means that the darkness cannot overpower the light – no matter what dark forces surround us in this troubled world of ours.

We try to put all this into our thoughts and words and prayers on Christmas morning and, of course, we fail miserably. That is why the symbols of Christmas, the carols we sing are so important. Because art and music, poetry and science carry truths which go far deeper than human words. So do the works of charity which are so much part of Christmas. All summed up in the word “love” – whatever that means as Prince Charles once said so enigmatically. Let me share with you a Christmas spin on St. Paul’s sermon on love sent to me recently. No doubt you will remember chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians: Faith, Hope and Love abide. But the greatest of these is love.

Corinthians 13: 4-8 – A Christmas Version

*If I decorate my house perfectly with streamers,
strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls,
but do not show love to my family,
I’m just another decorator.*

*If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of mince pies,
preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully
adorned table,
but do not show love to my family,*

*I'm just another cook.
If I work at the soup kitchen,
sing carols on the Church steps and give all that I have to
charity,
but do not show love to my family,
it profits me nothing.
If I decorate the tree with baubles and fairy lights
and attend a myriad of pre-Christmas parties
but do not focus on Christ,
I have missed the point.
Love stops the cooking to hug the child.
Love sets aside the decorating to listen to loved ones.
Love is kind, though harried and tired.
Love doesn't envy another's home
that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.
Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way,
but is thankful they are there to be in the way.
Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return
but rejoices in giving to those who can't.*

Love

*bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.*

Love never fails.

*Video games will break,
pearl necklaces will be lost
golf clubs will rust,
but giving the gift of love will endure.*
