



**Homily for Vigil Mass of Christmas**

**Cardiff Cathedral**

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

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Many of us, I imagine, will at least know the name of the father of modern psycho-analysis, Sigmund Freud. He worked with his colleague Carl Jung in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until professional disagreements led them to part company. Carl Jung then developed his own psycho analytical theories, many of which are still practiced today. He was particularly interested in dream analysis. Beneath the conscious level of our lives, there lie deep waters of subconscious thoughts, fears, guilt, anxiety, fantasy, anger and hopes. Psycho analysis helps people address these issues. Most of us never have to undergo analysis of this kind. But our subconscious world come to the surface when our defences are low, when we dream of have nightmares.

Even in our spiritual lives, there are often unresolved questions and tensions and even fears. *“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight”*. We all know how important it is to pray and how difficult it is to do so. How important it is to do the will of God, but not understand what God wants of me in this, that or the other situation. Important, also, to discern the presence of God in our world but find it contradicted in the many bad things that happen.

The gospel to which we have just listened to will help us. When Joseph was afraid, confused, hurt, angry at what he had found out about Mary, an angel of the Lord appeared to

him and spoke to him in a dream. *“Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. She has conceived what is within her by the Holy Spirit”*. In three other places Joseph is told “in a dream” 1. *“To take the child into Egypt because he is in danger”*. 2. When Herod had died, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream saying *“Rise, take the child and his mother and return to the land of Egypt”*. 3. On his way back, he was warned *“in a dream to go to Galilee in the north of Israel, to a town called Nazareth”*. And the rest is history, as they say.

If there had been psycho-analysts two thousand years ago, Joseph would have kept them busy with his dreams! But there is a lesson for us today in these wonderful images. Not everything is as it appears on the surface. Circumstances and experiences and even people, are not always what they seem. Impulsive judgments and behaviour often cause damage not just to other people but to ourselves as well. It was the Greek philosopher Socrates (470-399 B.C) who said *“The unexamined life is not worth living”*. In previous times we used to practice what was called “The Examination of Conscience” when we plumbed the depth and meaning of our thoughts, words and actions.

When we say we cannot pray, or we cannot hear God speak to us, or we cannot understand the will of God, perhaps it is because there is too much noise and distraction going on in

our lives. Perhaps we build barriers where nothing contradicts the view of the world, my version of reality which nothing or no one is allowed to question. Perhaps we are afraid to listen to 'the sound of silence' as Simon and Garfunkel so beautifully put it. Mother Teresa was once asked what she did when she prayed. *"I listen to God"* she replied. *"And what does God do?"* was the next question. *"God listens to me"*.

During all the worries and turmoil Joseph must have undergone during the events we are celebrating at Christmas, he could only hear God speak when his defences were down, when he was not in control, when he was dreaming. When Peter preached to the crowd after the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:14) he quoted the prophet Joel *"Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams"*. He knew all about dreams and vision. An angel woke him from his sleep-in prison and led him to freedom. Perhaps we should worry less and dream a bit more!

How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is given.  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls still receive Him still  
The dear Christ enters in.

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