

Christmas – 2020B

I am living through the wonder years. I wonder where I left my glasses. I wonder why I have gone into a particular room. I wonder what day it is. I wonder what I supposed to pick up at the store. But I am not alone.

People are forgetful. They even forget what this feast is about. Even good Christians. A poll done about 10 years ago found that the largest percentage of Christians interviewed said that Christmas was all about families getting together. I doubt that the results would be much different today. Because the Covid pandemic has kept many of us from being able to be with family this year that yearning for families to be together is perhaps even greater than usual. Well, that's nice, but what about Christmas being about Jesus?

Even those who did mention Christmas as the birth of Christ, the founder of Christianity, tended to focus on the wrong things. They tended to focus on the sentimentality of it all: the appealing baby in the manger, the crèche, the tableau of soft sweetness. Not one in a thousand, not one in a million, not, I suspect, most of us here, would zone in on the one word - a rather shocking word - that the Bible, the Church and tradition tell us is at the heart of Christmas. We, too, have forgotten.

That word is not sweetness, softness, gentleness. No, it is passion! Does that surprise you? Yet it's written all over the Christmas scene. The truth of the matter is that we don't have in Christmas sweetness and softness and gentleness. We have here, this Christmas night, plain, unadulterated, hard, raw passion. What I'm challenging your memory to recall is that, yes, we have a cuddly baby, but behind that facade, behind that tenderness, is a fierce and a passionate God, and that seldom comes across in the sentimental pageantry of the manger. Take a second look. The Christmas message and the Christmas celebration centres around God's great love for us, the commitment not to leave us abandoned, not to leave us in the darkness of political, social, or personal tyrannies.

The message of Christmas is summed up in that communication made by the angel to Mary at the Annunciation, "You shall call his name Jesus and he shall be known as Emmanuel, which translates 'God with us.'" Yes, "God with us," or in the reverential phrase of John's gospel, *Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

Why?... Why?... Why does God want to dwell among us? Because, simply put, the object of all love is union: to be with the beloved. So whatever it is, God has a thing for us, a passion. The real Christmas memory,

then, is not that of a passive, seductive baby Jesus but rather of an active, desiring God. Christmas is about a driving desire on God's part "to dwell among us," to be a part of the human condition. God loves us that much. God yearns for us that much. And that's passion.

If God is not with us and if God has not embraced our tattered lives, woe are we. There is no hope. And there is no light, only darkness and despair. And we are here tonight out of fruitless socializing, pressured routine, or empty sentimentality. But if we are here because of love and we are here like the rag-tag shepherds that we are, to kneel and rejoice, then we have caught Christmas's meaning: Emmanuel, the passionate God, has had his way and has hugged us fiercely.

A merry, passionate Christmas to you all!

Deacon Gerry

