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# God intends us to be fully human

Thomas Gumbleton | Dec. 30, 2009 The Peace Pulpit

I'm sure that all of us are aware that Christmas is the one feast day in the year where we have actually three separate celebrations of the feast, and each celebration has its own Liturgy of the Word with three separate lessons for each one of these liturgies. I think most of us are very familiar with the lesson that was proclaimed last night at the first Mass of Christmas, one usually celebrated just at the beginning of the new day. We might also be familiar with the Liturgy of the Word, the sacred scriptures, that are used at what we call the Mass of the Shepherds, the Mass that usually would be celebrated at dawn. Now we have the Mass of Christmas Day, with the three lessons that we just heard.

I think it's very important for us to try to listen to all of these lessons together, in a sense, that we get the full message of what God is proclaiming to us in this extraordinary, joyful and marvelous Feast of Christmas, the nativity of Jesus, the son of God, into our history.

We remember, I'm sure, how Matthew and Luke described the events that took place on that Christmas night, two thousand-some years ago ? the shepherds in the fields; later on the coming of the wise ones from the east; King Herod wondering who this new king is, and Jesus, Mary and Joseph having to flee to Egypt ? all of those events that took place, as Luke said, during that time when Caesar was the head of the Roman Empire; Tiberius was the king of Galilee; and Herod the king or the tetrarch of Abilene and Lysanias. That historical context, we're aware of.

We easily, I think, celebrate those events ? the joy, the excitement that goes with it ? but this morning, what God is doing through the word that we heard is helping us to understand *why* the son of God came into human history and how we are to respond to it.

The gospel of John, which we just heard the beginning of, was the latest of the gospels, probably not written until almost the year 100. By that time, the Christian community, the disciples of Jesus, had had many years to keep on reflecting, thinking, "What does all of this mean?"

THE Nativity of the Lord, Christmas

Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm 98: 1,2-3,3-4,5-6

Hebrews 1:1-6

John 1:1-18

Full text of the readings [1]

We must understand too, that the first disciples as they lived with Jesus during his life here on Earth, were not aware that he was the Word of God, the son of God. That awareness only came suddenly and dramatically when Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday morning. Then they realized, for the first time, "This is God, alive among us, the one who overcomes death, destroys death." God. So John now, as he writes the gospel, proclaims this message, and you hear it at the very beginning of the gospel lesson today, where John tells us: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

That idea of Jesus as the Word of God is what is spelled out more fully in that lesson from the letter to the Hebrews: "God has spoken in the past to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways, although never completely." What this passage goes on to say is that God is being revealed through all of human history. Going back to the very beginning, God is revealed in creation itself, if we can look deeply enough to see God's imprint on creation. But finally, as this letter to the Hebrews says, "God is revealed in the fullness of God, in the Word of God, the one who is the very person of God and who reflects all that God is, all who God is." This

Word of God is the fullness of the revelation of God.

So in Jesus then, for the first time in human history, we can see God, and that's an extraordinary thing because people always thought that no one could see God. God is spirit, God is not flesh and blood as we are, but now in Jesus, we can actually see God, see how God acts, see who God is, and of course, the reason for all of this is so that we might become like Jesus. He's one of us in every way, fully human, but he's also God, so when we look at Jesus, we see how he acts, we listen to what he says, we're watching God, we're hearing God speak. These are words that we must really take to heart; they come to us from God.

There's an ancient theological saying that goes back to the second or third century. One of the early teachers of the church proclaimed that "The glory of God is a human person fully alive." What gives praise and honor and glory to God, what God wants to receive from us is each of us to be fully alive, in other words, to be the full human person we are called to be. That's why it's so important to understand today's lessons. God is revealed in Jesus, who becomes fully human. If we become like Jesus, then we become the full human person God has called us to be.

All of our capacities will be developed and we can experience the fullness of joy and life and love that can come through every human if we're fully alive with the life that God gives to us, to become the full human person that God calls us to be. If we watch Jesus and listen to Jesus, who is God, but still one like us in every way, we will learn to become that full human person.

Of course, it takes all four gospels to really get the full dimensions of who Jesus is, but this morning I hope I can present just a couple of the things that Jesus proclaims in his presence among us that are current kinds of things that if we respond to, will help us to become more fully the human person God intends us to be that will make us more like God.

First of all, we notice, and our crib scene always makes this clear, Jesus is born into the world as someone who was poor. Jesus quickly identifies with the poor, those in need, becomes one of them, and later on in his life, Jesus preaches "Blessed are the poor." He doesn't mean those who are destitute and those who have nothing, but he means those who understand that everything we have is a gift from God and is to be shared. We are not to accumulate more and more things for ourselves, thinking that we can find security, that we can find fullness of life in material things, no, it's not going to happen. Jesus teaches us that?trust in God, try to be sure we have what we need, but not accumulate to excess.

In the culture where we live, we're constantly bombarded with the idea "you have to have something new, you have to get this and that," keep on accumulating, somehow it's going to make you happy. No, that won't happen. Jesus says we need enough to be fully human, but not more than enough, so we have to be like Jesus, always ready to share what we have, understanding that anything I have is simply a gift from God and God made the world for all and not just for a few, so we share.

A second thing that I think becomes very clear when we look at the life of Jesus?and again, we have to go through the gospels and we'll find this over and over again?one of the things that Jesus did was always to be compassionate and always quick to heal people: people trouble emotionally, Jesus was there to listen, to be compassionate; those who were afflicted with some terrible diseases, Jesus was always ready to reach out, to touch the eyes of the blind or the ears of the deaf, to heal the lepers and make them clean. How might that relate to our world right now?

We've been struggling over the last weeks and months even, trying to develop a way to make sure that every person in our country gets healthcare. Why is it such a struggle? If we really understand who Jesus is and how he wants to make sure everyone has access to what they need to be healthy, alive, we would be quick to develop a system where everyone has the chance for healthcare. We would understand that it's people, we would share

the benefits that we've developed in our medical sciences, that everyone could benefit. Jesus reached out to those who were ill, and healed. We need to become more like that.

Finally, perhaps the most timely thing and maybe the most difficult, would be to understand more deeply and then to imitate how Jesus always rejected the use of violence. He came into the world to teach us that if you're going to overcome injustice, oppression and situations of hatred and violence, you won't do it with more violence; you'll do it through the transforming power of love, and not just love for those who love you, but love of your enemy, doing good to those who hurt you. That's so important, probably the most radical message of Jesus, but it's the part of the message of Jesus that could bring peace into our hearts, peace into our neighborhoods, into our families and into our world, if only we would understand and follow how Jesus showed us to be fully human by learning to love, and making that fascinating power of love the power that changes the world.

We can't do all of this today, of course, on this Feast of Christmas, but I offer these as suggestions as to where we might go in our lives to find the way to become the full human person that Jesus calls us to be. The Word of God came into human history to proclaim to every one of us who God is and how we can become like God?a message of great hope, a message that can bring us great joy, a message that can bring us full peace. Listen to this Word of God, that was born into our midst, this morning and be willing to change our lives to follow him and to live according to the way he shows us.

[This homily was preached at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich.]

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