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The Divine is greater than our dogmas

Angie O'Gorman | Dec. 23, 2011

Christmas

A few years ago during a Sunday homily, a Catholic priest in Australia preached to his congregation that the most dangerous place on Earth was a woman?s womb. I know what he was trying to get at, however poor his attempt, however misplaced his intentions, however misogynist his worldview. A terrible sadness rose in me when I heard about this, and a great anger. But why does this come to my mind now as I begin to reflect on the coming Christmas Mass at dawn?

The other image that comes is Bethlehem as it exists today in occupied Palestine, a war zone.
In between these two images I sit immobilized by what we have done to the Incarnation, by the total denial of God among us that now defines how we live with each other and the creation from within which we come.

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas),

Full text of the readings [1]

Did it matter at all, that birth under the stars, that birth in an animal stall when a woman?s womb was good enough for Jesus? Are we so mythologized to the uniqueness of the scene that we miss the message? Do we think that Jesus was the only baby born that night to poor parents sheltering in a barn? Do we think Mary and Joseph were unique in their mixture of joy and pain and worry at the birth of their son? None of it was unique. It was normal. That?s the point. The Divine in our life is normal. It is normative. It is how things are. That is what matters, God is here, participating. What we celebrate at Christmas merely gives us eyes to see it. Words to describe it.

In Jesus? native Aramaic the concept we know as heaven has an imminent quality. According to scholar Neil Douglas-Klotz, the Aramaic carries the image of ?light and sound shining through all creation.? There is not a sense of above and beyond as in the English word heaven. But we already know this. Generations of Catholics learned that God is everywhere, omnipotent and omnipresent; then we stuck the Divine up in heaven and that was that.

Christmas can help us readjust, help us see the Divine more transparently in life, in places where we would least expect. A barn, for example, a baby. The Incarnation we celebrate at Christmas is a call, our belief in it a commitment, to seek awareness of the Divine free of the impediments of culture, class or even catechism. That process calls for a degree of openness most of us rarely embrace or even know as possible. Yet I have a feeling

the Divine is so imminent, so within the essence of things, that it is only a matter of learned blindness that keeps us from seeing. It is not something natural to us to be so dense. We can do better. We can break through.

May the incarnation dawn in us this Christmas morning. May we awaken into a broader and deeper awareness of God present, especially in those on whom we project our own partial truths and worst fears. May we remember the Divine is greater than our comfortable categories and dogmas, is greater, dare we admit it, than ourselves. And in that light, may we remember that our enemies are not God?s enemies, and welcome the grace to stop inflaming the conflicts we decry and disowning the victims we create.

[Angie O?Gorman?s reflections on the Advent and Christmas scripture readings are on the *NCR* website at NCRonline.org/blogs/spiritual-reflections.]

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Links:
[1] http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122511-mass-at-dawn.cfm