

## **Theological Reflection** **Jesus “be born in us today”**

We continued, as faithful Catholics, to celebrate Jesus’ birth during these past 12 days of Christmas. The Church, in her wisdom, gives us these grace-filled days to thank God for taking on flesh for each of us. Thanks to St. Francis of Assisi we have our crèche, our manger to contemplate in simple thanksgiving the mystery of God becoming man. The two mysteries of the Incarnation and Mary’s role as Mother of God would take a lifetime to understand.

And yet there is even more that God and the Church would have us consider. We sing of the mystery in the Christmas carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” that says to Jesus “be born in us today.” As if the giving us the Son of God was not present enough. Jesus desires to be born in us, in our lives and in our very souls. We stand before the manger in awe that the baby before us is God become man. God the Father stands before us happy to see his only begotten Son in residence in our humble stable. As baptized Catholics, as baptized Christians, we share in the life of the Trinity and God dwells within us. We believe this mystery even though it seems less known than the Incarnation of Jesus. But it is just as true. God dwells in us. Jesus desires to live his life again in each of us through our toil, joys and sufferings.

We see God most clearly through the actions of others. The media, during Christmas season, related touching stories of loving kindness and even random acts of kindness that hints that something more is happening here than just kindness. It is God working in men, women and children. At the Macy’s jewelry counter a few weeks ago a woman told me that the person in the car before her in the fast food line paid for her order. She told me she was going to do the same, passing kindness along. “It is the Lord.” With any act of kindness and self-giving love comes the thought that God prompted it, arranged it, and lives in the action itself.

There is a “Christmas” movie shown each holiday season entitled “The Bishop’s Wife” starring David Niven, Loretta Young and Cary Grant. Niven, a Bishop, is consumed with the building of a cathedral, has lost contact with his wonderful wife, and calls out to the Lord for help, for guidance in building the cathedral. God sends an angel Dudley, Cary Grant, in answer. It is a delightful tear jerker, at least it was for me, in which the small acts of kindness have great power: Dudley notices and comments favorably on hats or jewelry, he calls people by their names, he enjoys the simple things – snow, ice-skating, he furnishes wine for a non-believing crotchety professor. He allows people to be themselves. I am sure God prompted the producer, blessed the scenes and uses the movie as a wonderful vehicle

## **Theological Reflection** **Jesus “be born in us today”**

demonstrating how he works through angels in our own lives. One step beyond is the conclusion that God works through human beings in the exact same way because he lives in us and He is love itself. It is difficult to spot an angel but God working in others is right before our eyes.

Adrienne and I witness it in our family all the time and most recently on our trip to Cleveland to visit Marie, our daughter, Trace, son-in-law and 2 grandchildren, Winter Sophia and Lucas. Trace took the week off, looked through cookbooks and prepared special fancy meals. I was most touched that besides everything that he did included cleaning up, that he prepared a snack tray for me as I rested on his sofa. Love in action was noticed and thanked.

Caryl Houselander, one of my favorite authors and a true mystic, writes so beautifully about the blessed realization that Jesus lives his life in each of us – in politicians, in royalty, in the person on the bus or subway. It is the Lord that we see each day in each of us. Hans Urs von Balthasar from a theological point of view states the same. Jesus lives his life in us in hidden ways. He states rather strongly that it is not we who rejoice but Jesus rejoicing in us. It is not we who suffer but Jesus suffers in us.

Mystics and theologians are giving us the same message. God is love and he and his love live in us. Not only are we to notice Him in others but we are to pass along the love we have received. His light that shines so clearly in some is to be shining in us also so that even non-believers can see God in us. The random acts of kindness that we receive prompt us to do the same for others.

As this new year of 1012 unfolds we might consider developing the habit of recognizing Jesus in people. As we fervently pray that Jesus would be born anew in us each day may we also have eyes to see the same occurrence in others and say throughout the day upon seeing or greeting other – “It is the Lord.”

January 5, 2012

Ronald Novotny, Ph.D., S.T.L.