

## **The Inclusive Community**

**Christmas Eve, Saturday Dec. 24, 2008**

### **Homily of Anthony T. Padovano**

**The Christmas Gospel may well be the most beautiful story ever told. The human family has survived and developed as human by its love of stories. Without stories, we would be adrift. Stories are the GPS which brings us home.**

**We tell stories daily. People who love each other say every day something like this: “Let me tell you what happened today.” They will also reveal deep dimensions of their lives: “I never told anyone this before, but...” Or, “I have heard your story and I forgive you.”**

**Stories are the tapestry that weaves our lives together, the DNA and double helix of our souls, twisting and yearning to bring us together. The saddest of all events in life is to find no one who wants to hear your story.**

**The Christmas story may be the best story ever told. We still gather millennia later, around the campfire, with our Christmas candles, to tell the story again and to feel its power and its beauty, its heart-ache and its glory.**

**Why does the Christmas story work? Why is it loved so much? What makes it bring all the world into it?**

**I believe the Christmas Gospel tells us three things about God that we need desperately to hear, three things that are Christianity’s contribution to the other religions and to the human family.**

- **God is vulnerable**

**The first disclosure the Christmas story reveals is that God is vulnerable.**

**“Vulnerable” comes from the Latin word which means “wound.” God can be wounded.**

**Christianity is the only religion that tells us God is an infant. Nothing is more vulnerable than an infant.**

**If God is revealed in a special way in Jesus Christ, then God is vulnerable.**

**Why is this important?**

**It is important because we cannot love anyone who is not vulnerable. Love is a wound and a wonder. Even the pagan cupid is shown as shooting an arrow as a way of making love happen.**

**If God is the creator of the universe and all-powerful, if God is the judge who brings justice to the world, if God is the redeemer who leads us home, if God is all this, then God is mighty and awesome, loveable but fearsome. We feel gratitude for such a God but tremble on getting too near.**

**The Christmas Gospel tells us God is vulnerable. What is more vulnerable than an infant?**

**God, therefore, can be hurt.**

**We do not truly love who God is, indeed, we cannot love the world and the way it goes, we cannot have hope, unless we have a God who suffers all the pain the world endures. All the pain of all the conscious beings in the world, all the pain of every human being, must register with God or else we cannot love God deeply or life deeply or the creative process deeply.**

**The cosmic God must be a wounded God, a God of tears and anguish, for us to know God is ours.**

**Christmas tells us God is someone we can take into our arms, someone who does not overpower us, someone we can set aside or someone we can protect from further suffering.**

**God is an infant.**

**“Away in a Manger” says it. God is not enthroned in power but bereft in a manger, vulnerable, almost impossible not to love, the way a baby is.**

- **God is Silent**

**The second of our trinitarian themes from the Christmas Gospel is the silence of God.**

**If God is revealed in an utterly unique manner in Jesus, then God is silent; often and for long periods of time. The Word of God is silent. Perhaps, better, the Word of God speaks in silence.**

**If God is an infant, then God is silent. “Infant” comes from the Latin word meaning “someone who cannot yet speak.”**

**Every parent knows an infant cannot speak but every parent hopes one day it will and lives in the hope that the child will speak in a language both parent and child can share.**

**But in the years when the child cannot speak, when it is silent, when its words are barely recognizable, the silent child communicates and the parent gets a message, not clear but real.**

**The silence of God and the silence of the universe tell us that the Word of God does not overpower or overwhelm us. The Word of God, in our arms, searches for a language that God and each of us can share. The Word of God not only speaks a language from God's heart and spirit but a language we teach God to speak as God learns who and what we are. God learns a new language as God communicates with each and every one of us.**

**The infant God, the silent God, will one day speak clearly but it takes a long time. God, like an infant, does not rush the process but waits for the proper time. The Word of God, Christmas tells us, is silent and often stutters and stammers, seeking to find a way to make God's Word our word, in our language. It is then that we love this vulnerable, silent God all the more.**

**Isn't "Silent Night" a perfect carol for the infant, silent God?**

- **God is an Act of Hope**

**The very existence of the infant, from its first hour of life, teaches us that what it is, is mostly unfinished. An infant is all potential. That potential will become reality only by an act of hope in the infant.**

**A parent is a wild act of hope. The parent has so much hope in the infant that it will do anything, even sacrifice its life, so that the infant may have a future.**

**We love unfinished things. Finished realities do not move us as deeply.**

**We are moved by stories of romance because the relationship is mostly unfinished. We want an unfinished God and an unfinished cosmos so that we can love it more.**

**God is an unfinished symphony, a silent child, a vulnerable infant. We are the notes and the score that becomes God's song. We are the words God learns to speak. We are the healer of God's wounds and of this world's sorrow. The melody of God's life picks up the beat of our life.**

**God will become us by an act of hope God makes in us. We shall become God by the act of hope we make in life.**

**Quite a story. We try to grasp it and we gasp before it. So God is vulnerable and silent, an infant in our arms, an unfinished poem, a symphony seeking further music.**

**How could we not love an infant?**

**How could we not hope in it?**

**The Christmas carol which works so well with hope is “We Three Kings,” a journey of hope, lost in the stars, bearing gifts in the hope that they will find someone to receive them.**

**And so Christmas is a trinity story as well as a narrative for the child in all of us.**

**God is a Creator who is vulnerable**

**God is a Word who is silent**

**God is a Spirit of Hope in an unfinished world**

**In all my years of pastoral ministry, I never found people more capable of faith than when they hold their child in their arms. No one believes in miracles more than a parent who looks at a newborn child as well as all those who take the child also in their arms and laugh and weep in astonishment. It is virtually impossible to tell a parent the universe is meaningless, not while it holds its child near its heart.**

**Christmas tells us that is what God is. Our love of an infant is the only faith God wants from us.**