

Gospel text

John 1: 1-18

1 At the origin of everything is the word,
and this word was related to God,
and that word is God himself,

2 He was in relationship with God from the beginning.

3 All things came into existence through him,
and without him there would be nothing.

4 In him we find life,
a life that was light for men.

5 The light is there shining in the darkness,
and this darkness has failed to master him.

6 One day there appeared a man sent by God, whose name was John.

7 He came as a witness to testify about the light,
in order to get everyone to believe thanks to him.

8 He was not the light, his role was rather to bear witness to the light.

9 This word was the true light and coming into our world, he enlightens all men.

10 He was present in the world,
and it is indeed through him that this world came into existence,
but unfortunately the latter did not recognize him.

11 He came into what is his domain,
but his own family refused to welcome him.

12 But to those who welcomed him, he gave strength to become children of God, all those people who believe in him, 13 who owe their existence neither to human procreation, nor to natural desire, nor to the will of a particular man, but to God himself.

14 And the word took on a carnal existence and came to dwell in our midst, and we saw the extraordinary quality of his being, a quality as the only child of the Father, which makes him a person overflowing with love and totally true.

15 John testifies about him when he shouted out loud, "This is the man I said: after me someone comes before me, because long before me he existed."

16 So then, we have shared in this superabundant wealth, love upon love.

17 For the law was given by Moses, but overflowing love and the whole truth came through Jesus the Messiah. 18 God, no one has ever been able to see him; but the only son of God, who is in intimate relationship with the Father, was able to present him to us.

Gospel commentary - Homily

Easter cannot exist without Christmas

The feeling facing Christmas is ambiguous. Many people are looking forward to this holiday season where the atmosphere is festive, where there is an uproar, where we exchange gifts, where we meet with relatives and friends, where work time stops for make way for free times. For others, on the other hand, it is the obsession with these big moments of solitude, the crucifying reminder of children who are no longer there or who will not come, the pain of not being part of the party. I will always remember this man met in Christmas time on a plane coming back from the west coast where he worked in a mine, separated or divorced from his spouse, I don't know, and who shared his retch with respect to this time of year, which only reopened the gaping wound of a family that no longer existed.

It is the same ambiguity that we find in the Gospel story planned by the liturgy for Christmas: "The light is there shining in the darkness, and this darkness failed to master him... and it is indeed through him that this world came into existence, but unfortunately the latter did not recognize him.... ". What is more desirable than life and light? Christmas coincides with this time when we celebrate the lengthening of the day, and the decrease of the night. Why then speak of a rejection of light? Likewise, according to the evangelist, we are woven from the same fiber as this Word of God. What does it mean then that the world has not recognized him? There is something tragic here that we must try to understand. Because what we say, in a word, is that alienation from one's true being is part of our world, and therefore describes a facet of our lives.

What do you think is one of the biggest difficulties in life, one where many stumble? Personally, I answer: life itself, its very existence. Because there is of course the joy of living, but there is also aging and death. There is the pleasure of discovering, but there is also the existence of limits where each small answer is painfully obtained bit by bit. There is the pleasure of this body which can run and dance, but there is the disease, the physical handicaps, the consequences of a body too big or too small. There is the wonder of love, but also loneliness, hatred and violence. There is this unique and mysterious thing called: freedom. But this freedom leaves room for a lot of catastrophic choices, so much so that the first thing that would be eliminated if man could recreate man - it's a personal conviction - is freedom.

To accept to celebrate Christmas is to enter this world of light and shadow, it is to accept this long birth of self and of this world that we live in, not as we imagine it when we take paths to escape, but as it really is. Where do you think the person of Jesus was built as his last 3 years will reveal, if not in the daily life of Nazareth? Where has his perception of God been refined, if not in his prayer and the contact with events and beings?

In a symbolic way, our attitude towards the body, at the same time cherished and hated, source at the same time of so much joys and sorrows, condenses the direction of our relations with the universe. Everyone will find a back and forth movement between full acceptance and rejection, between a conscious commitment and a total passivity. However, the promised land towards which Advent has made us journey, is not elsewhere than there, and if Easter can occur, we must first be born to oneself and to one's world, we must enter this flesh to experience the "resurrection of the flesh", that flesh where the Word of life has set up its tent.

It is customary in religious circles to condemn the mercantile face of Christmas. Why not go beyond the shadows of these social conditioning, and see in these multiple moments of festivities this light which shows this facet of us, a being who, beyond work, needs others to learn to live. Why not see in these moments when the children occupy the stage, despite the excesses of the child-king, that our person is not defined first by his work, his social status, his income, but by his unique character, and that it is constantly growing.

May Christmas be this moment of reconciliation with the person we are, with this world of ours. Because there is no other place to walk towards Easter.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, September 2001