

Sunday Homily

SECOND SUNDAY BEFORE LENT

7 FEBRUARY 2021

YEAR B

“The Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory.”

John 1:14

Illustration

There’s a series of wonderful books for children which tell the adventures of Little Bear, who lives with Big Bear in the Bear Cave. One of them tells how one night Little Bear cannot get to sleep. It turns out that the problem is that he is afraid of the dark. Big Bear produces ever bigger lanterns but Little Bear is still afraid of the huge dark outside the Bear Cave. Eventually Big Bear takes Little Bear outside and shows him the moon and the stars, lighting up the sky, and then Little Bear falls asleep.

We can light up our own little world, but sometimes the bigger picture is frightening even for Big Bears. The world can seem a random and terrifying place, containing who knows what dangers, and threatening extinction in all kinds of horrible ways. Today’s Gospel reading speaks to those fears.

Gospel Teaching

The readings set for today deal with very complex matters of faith. They speak of the creation of the universe, at the very beginnings of time, a time beyond the capacity of the human brain to imagine. And they speak of God incarnate, the creator of the universe somehow living a human life among us.

How can we speak of such matters? The biblical writers know well that only the language of poetry will suffice. Prose soon gets tangled in its own logic, and scientific language reaches its limits; only poetry can hope to convey the mystery of these huge ideas. So the prologue to the Gospel of John uses imagery to convey its message. The Word became flesh. The light shines in the darkness. We have seen his glory. The language is magnificent, and this passage deserves its fame for its poetry alone.

But the point it is making is one of deep significance. The author of the fourth Gospel uses the term “Word” for the one who became incarnate, echoing the Wisdom language of the Old Testament. By doing so, he reinforces his point that the one who becomes human and lives among us is no other than the one who was present at the foundation of the world. The author echoes the language of the book of Proverbs, which describes Wisdom being beside God when he laid the foundations of the earth. And he also echoes the language of Genesis, which also begins with the phrase, “In the beginning”.

So he makes the connections between God's actions in the beginning and his actions in Christ. The Word who became flesh "was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him." The one who brought the very first light out of the dark wastes described in Genesis is the one who now shines in the darkness. The one who breathed life into the very first of God's children on earth is the one who now brings new life, "the power to become children of God".

Application

So how can such deep matters of theology speak to our fears? First, they show the consistency of God. Jesus does not appear from nowhere as a kind of random teacher and miracle worker, John's Gospel asserts. The incarnation of the Word is all of a piece with God's acts from the very beginning. Creation and recreation belong together. We can trust God, because it was he who formed our world and us in it and it was he who cared enough for our world to come and live in it. The God we worship today is that same creator God, known to us through Christ.

Secondly, order in the universe is asserted. We are not an accident and nor is our world. The creation of the world is purposeful, and so is its salvation. The world began when God spoke his Word, and it will not end until he says so. From the Greek for "word" we get our word "logic". There is a logic in the universe, and it is God's own logic, his purposes being worked out.

The world out there may seem a dark and dangerous and meaningless place sometimes, but we are assured that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it". It may be difficult to see God's purposes as more than a flickering candle in the dark, but the incarnation of the Word means that at least we have seen them in our own shape. In Christ incarnate we are given a glimpse of God's purposes in human form. "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory." And that is enough.