

Christmas Day, 2017.

A Christmas Story.

Before I say anything about Christmas, I want to share a story with you, - a fairy tale really, told by Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, who lived 200 years ago, at much the same time as that other great Danish storyteller, Hans Christian Andersen.

He tells how once upon a time there was a powerful and wise king who fell in love with a beautiful maiden in his kingdom, but he had a royal problem: How to tell her of his love? The best and brightest were called to give advice. The Ita Buttrose's and such-like of that day were sought out so that everything would be done in a proper way. When everyone had had his or her say, the king was left disappointed, for each of these expert advisors had provided just what the king did not want or need. Namely, the king was advised to show up at the maiden's house in all his royalty and simply dazzle the girl into being his. What girl could resist? Whose head would not be turned? Who could refuse the king?

Remember, we said that the king was not only powerful, but also wise. He would have none of it! You see, our king wanted the girl to love him for himself, and not for his position or power. Love freely given must be freely returned, or it is not real love. The girl could be impressed, and even 'learn' to love the king. But, the king saw that he would never know if she really loved him for himself or simply for the comforts that queenship offered. So, our king stripped himself of glory and power. He wore the clothes of a poor peasant and so dressed he went to her cottage and declared his love.

Kierkegaard's story parallels beautifully the story of Christmas. For our God comes to us as one of us. God wants us to respond to his first having loved us. That love must be freely given. God could have come as the Anointed One on clouds and filled with glory. God could have turned heads and so filled us with awe, so as to ensure a favourable response from us. It would have been so easy, - TOO EASY. For as much as God wants us as his own, even more does he want us to love Him. For, if we truly, freely, love Him, we will also do the Father's will with a perfect grace. Jesus was so responsive, so obedient to his Father's will, because he loved his Father so.

Like the king in our story, our God is as wise as he is powerful. In the words of St. Paul to the Philippians: "Have this attitude among yourselves, which is that of Christ Jesus: though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God a thing to be grasped at. Rather he emptied

himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men". God comes to us not with a bang, but with the cry of a child.

Our God comes to us as a human being, needful, vulnerable, and open to suffering because he loves us. All of this our God becomes because he wants us to love him in return. No doubt, there are easier ways in which he could have done this. But our God doesn't want cheap grace or a superficial love. He gives and expects the real thing.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, which we had as our second reading, we hear some powerful words: "In times past, God spoke in fragmentary and in varied ways.... In this final age, he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he has made heir of all things, and through whom he first created the universe."

As we come together at the Lord's table this Christmas Day we need to ask ourselves: "What are the words spoken to us? What is the message of the "Word made flesh" for us?"

The Prologue of St. John's Gospel which we had as our Gospel reading just now doesn't sound very Christmassy, - at least not if you are thinking in terms of a stable, of shepherds, and Angels singing, but it is profoundly Christmassy when you are thinking about the mystery that took place in that stable in Bethlehem. Just listen to those words again:

We can sing of a stable, of Angels, shepherds and kings, but in the end that was only the window-dressing: the real mystery is that Christ, the Son of God, came to dwell among us, that we might again become the children of God, able to live with his life, his love and his compassion, to the glory of God the Father. That's the reason for the season, - nothing else.