

CHRISTMAS HOMILY 2021

It is a pretty exciting event. I say this never having experienced it directly but was down in London baptizing a new great niece a while ago and it was a great moment. (When you have to think, No, she is not a 'niece,' but a great niece, it makes you think!)

Above all it was a very joyful event, a family event. And I know I am blessed to have such a family.

At the same time, however exciting it might be, a new baby comes with responsibilities and challenges, and especially if it is your first. It can mean quite a rethink of your lives. Many of you will have already experienced that. Babies, children (however old) can have their ups and downs and that can challenge us at any time in our lives. We accept this because we love them, often have to adjust our lives because of this love.

I have never really had responsibility like a parent, only the odd bit of baby-sitting. But even then it comes home to you how you have to keep an eye on children all the time. They look as though they are barely crawling yet seem to be able to get across a room in no time. Or in my experience jump up and down on a bed and then disappear between the beds with a bump, to my horror.

As some of you will know I love films and listen to Kermode and Mayo's podcast on Radio 5 Live. They were interviewing Maggie Gyllenhall about her latest film and she was talking about the difference children make to your lives, and through it all, how you grow, you have to grow.

Children bring families together, they make families, they bring joy and love, and yet they bring responsibilities too and they take time, our time, and change our lives, and they make us grow.

So children change our lives. So when we come to Christmas and we place the baby Jesus in the manger to celebrate God being born like one of us as Jesus, 'A Saviour has been born to us, as the angels announce,' we should be full of joy. If someone comes into your life and says 'Heaven is yours,' 'You will all live in peace and joy,' then that is a real reason for celebration, and however we are doing it this weekend, tucking into turkey or a Vegan alternative these days, then we should do so with a sense that it is right to celebrate and enjoy it. It really is something to celebrate.

But in doing so, and being here now, in church, we are saying, each in their own way, that this 'Jesus', this 'Saviour,' which is what the name Jesus actually means, the same as Joshua, then we accept the joy, but also what also goes with welcoming a new baby. There are responsibilities and challenges.

This is what I mean by this: we sometimes call people who look after a child, 'guardians,' and when it comes to Jesus, we are guardians, not so much of him, but of his message. When Jesus was here on earth he did not talk about himself so much as his message about the Kingdom of heaven. When the angels arrived that night they came to announce him and his message of peace. Even the rough and ready shepherds rush off to tell people and 'everyone was astonished' at what they said.

Now I am sure that not everyone who comes to Mass this Christmas will be regular Mass goers, some will, some won't. (It is part of my job to recommend that we are!) But however we practice our faith, what is important is something that the Pope underlines frequently when he talks, that we are all interconnected in and with God's creation. Jesus Christ is the one through whom all was created, he is the link. Then he comes again to be among us, in his birth, and then at every Mass and in our prayer lives, and in all creation. Our message is that Jesus comes seeking harmony, peace among us all and all creation. Jesus' own words and actions, when he urges us to forgive 77 times, to love our enemy, to seek him in the poor and the ostracized. These are the directions he points us in to find this peace, his peace.

Yes, he comes as a baby and we celebrate it, but like any baby he does come to disrupt our lives as well, and like a new baby in the family he says to us, he shows us how others are important, all others.

So when we celebrate this Christmas let's do so aware of others, not in a way that should stop us celebrating, but in a way that the joy we have has to be shared. Jesus is a child of all humanity and God, and he comes to unite us all in his joy and peace, which he asks us to take from this Mass to all we meet.