

Christmas Eve Mass

December 24, 2011

We come to our Christmas crèche tonight knowing that holiness can be found in the most ordinary places and events in our lives.

Sure, there are angels and heavenly hosts praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest.” But these angels were different. They were not gazing into the clouds. They were angels who were *bending near the earth* to touch their harps of gold. They were speaking to ordinary working people, shepherds. And the sign the angels gave them was that of an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes. In those days every child was wrapped in swaddling clothes, which were strips of cloth to keep the child’s limbs straight. God came to us as a child held in restraint, vulnerable, held back from even appearing as a god but glimpsed only as an ordinary child.

In Luke’s Gospel, Mary and Joseph travel a treacherous path because of the census. But once again, it is a story that reminds us that Mary and Joseph shared the ordinary pain and suffering of so many other refugees in our time and place attempting to make their way safely into a better land.

Christmas reminds us that despite the evil in our world, grace abounds and holiness is found in what is most ordinary in our lives. Just as we have the tendency to make evil a superhero, we do the same with holiness. We think that only God and the saints are holy. We forget that God came to us as one of us, an ordinary child, restrained, whimpering, exposed to all of life’s cruel humiliations.

Dorothy Day who for a time lived at the Catholic Worker House of Hospitality here in Seattle used to get furious when someone would call her a saint. “You are trying to get yourself off the hook. I’m just an ordinary person. You can do the same thing and live the same way as I do.” Goodness and holiness is not easy to define. But we know it when we see it and experience it.

This silent night we find goodness and holiness in a scene so ordinary that we might miss it if it were not for our brothers and sisters, our mothers and fathers, who came before us. They left us with a faith that is capable of knowing that in the very ordinary situation of our lives and times, goodness is more powerful than evil, faith is stronger than death.

A stable can be a cathedral. Bread can be God. Our lives can be Godlike – all because of Christmas.

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor