

12.25.2020 Christmas Day (John 1; Hebrews 1)

Fr. Joseph Damien was a nineteenth century priest and missionary who ministered to people with leprosy on the island of Molokai in Hawaii. The lepers who lived in this community grew to love him and were truly blessed by the sacrificial life he lived out before them. Fr. Damien wasn't a priest on an elevated pulpit, he was a priest who cleaned up huts and took care of the sick. He not only preached and offered the Sacraments, he helped build roads, water systems, orphanages, and churches. He started a choir and a band. Fr. Damien ministered to the sick, to the suffering, and to the outcast in a way that honored their dignity as people who bear the image of God.

One morning before daily Mass, Fr. Damien was pouring some hot water into a cup when some of the water spilled onto his bare foot. It took him a moment to realize that he hadn't felt any sensation of pain, but just a few seconds later, in fear of what this would mean, he poured more hot water on the same spot. When once again there was no feeling of pain, he knew that he had contracted leprosy. Fr. Damien always began his sermon by greeting his congregation and saying, "My dear lepers," but that morning he began in a much more personal way, with the greeting, "My fellow lepers."

Fr. Damien's story reflects the message of Christmas, the message that God is not a distant, cosmic force that created the world and then left it spinning on its own. God is a personal Being, a Trinity of Persons, and in the Person of Jesus Christ, God stepped into the world He created. The message that the wise men sought, the angels announced, and the shepherd's heard is that God became man. God with us is the message of Christmas.

In the Gospel passage we read this morning, St. John begins by illustrating the immeasurable height and unfathomable depth of God's existence. St. John describes the glory that the Person of Christ, the Word of God, shared with the Father, through the Holy Spirit, "before all worlds" (The Nicene Creed; John 17:5, 24), and with the truth established that our Lord is an Eternal, Absolute, Uncreated Being who stands outside the created limits of space and time, St. John declares: "*the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14).

The One True God, who our Lord identifies as an immortal, invisible, incorruptible Spirit (John 4:24) took upon Himself human flesh that sinful men would pierce. The One True God who “*heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain*” (1 Kings 8:27) became an embryo in Mary’s womb. The One True God who made “*all things*” and upholds “*all things*” by His Word (John 1:3; Hebrews 1:3) chose to depend on St. Mary to nurse Him and St. Joseph to protect them.

“*The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,*” or as that verse is paraphrased in the Message translation, “*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.*” Isn’t that exactly what we see in Jesus? In Him, the Word of God, the Eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity *became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.* No longer can we think of God as being somewhere out there, watching us from a safe distance, far removed from the challenges of our daily lives. By clothing Himself in human flesh, God became to us, what Fr. Damien became to the lepers on Molokai. God became Someone who can personally identify with every aspect of our lives. He became the neighbor who helps you fix your car, the friend who laughs at all your jokes, the person who never lets you down.

Fr. Damien ministered to lepers as a leper, God chose to minister to us as a man, “*the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5), and by doing so, our Lord showed us that God, the Creator of all things, is not an abstract concept or a philosophical argument, God is a Person. In Jesus Christ, God is a Person who rejoiced with His disciples when they returned from their missionary journey (Luke 10:18), and a Person who wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). He experienced hunger and thirst, He became tired and needed to sleep, and as inconceivable as it is, yet it is a truth we profess in the Apostle’s Creed: In Christ, God “was crucified, dead, and buried.”

Here’s the point: The Creator has entered His creation. Our Lord, who ruled the universe that He created from His throne in glory, who reigned in majesty beyond anything we can imagine, came at Christmas to be born in a stable, to sleep in a feed trough, to grow into a man who personally experienced everything it means to be human, from the cradle to the grave. As we celebrate Christmas Day, and bring to mind this baby born in Bethlehem, consider the unimaginable miracle that God the Son, who made heaven and

earth, vast beyond our comprehension, chose to enter His creation in pursuit of you. Consider all that Jesus gave up at Christmas to come to you in human flesh, consider the greater truth that He came to die for you, and you will never again doubt the extent of God's love for you.