

2nd Sunday after the Nativity (B)
(Sir 24:1-2.8-12 / John 1:1-18)
04.01.2015

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today, the liturgy proposes that we meditate for the third time in ten days the Prologue of St John's gospel as reading for the Eucharist: This presents a real challenge for preachers! It reminds me the good old time when this gospel passage was read at the end of each Eucharist. It was known as "the last gospel" and was read, even in France where priests usually take more time over things, in an Irish manner, that is to say very quickly! The reason for reading this text at the end of each Eucharist was to remind us of the importance of God's incarnation in Jesus. We believe that Jesus came into the world to reconcile the sinners that we all are with God. But Jesus came into the world also and perhaps above all for three other motives. First: to reveal to humankind God's infinite love for them. We read in the first letter of St John: "This is the revelation of God's love for us, that God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through Him" (1Jn 4,9). Then, Jesus came into the world to be our model of holiness: He said: "I am the way, the truth and the life... no one comes to the Father, but by me"... and again "Love one another as I have loved you". This love implies an effective offering of oneself. The example par excellence of this self-offering is Jesus. And finally Christ came into the world to make us partakers of the divine nature: through Him, we receive divine sonship, we become sons and daughters of God. These motives for the incarnation are the teaching of the Tradition of the Church, underlined in the catechism of the Catholic Church. Let us be careful not to reduce the motive of the incarnation to the forgiveness of our sins. It is much more. It is above all a free expression of God's infinite love for humankind. We sing in the Creed: "For us.... and for our salvation, he came down from heaven".

At the heart of the Prologue of St John's gospel, we read that "the Word of God, was made flesh, he lived among us". In the original Greek text, we read that "He pitched his tent among us". Let us retain the image of the tent for our meditation today.

A tent is a temporary accommodation. When the Word of God became flesh, He did not set up a permanent house to stay with us forever in human form. His presence was the temporary span of a human life, time from birth to death. This does not mean that after his death the Lord is no longer in our midst. We believe that he has risen and that he remains alive among us. He remains alive among us through his Word contained in the Sacred Scriptures, a Word which we have to listen to, meditate upon and put into practice each day of our lives. He remains alive among us through his Church, her sacraments, included the sacrament of our brothers and sisters in the faith who were created in the image and likeness of God. He remains alive among us through the Holy Spirit who leads us into the whole truth and reminds us all that the Lord has said. The Lord's way of being with us implies that we cannot control Him, we cannot master his presence. On the contrary, the Lord reveals himself to us as the God of surprises! The Lord is exactly the contrary of an idol! We cannot enclose him in a box, or contain Him in a system. The Lord is fully alive and invites us to be fully alive.

A tent is a dwelling, but a mobile dwelling. Jesus, the Word made flesh, did not come to live in a remote place, a palace or a castle, keeping his people at a distance. To meet with the Lord Jesus

we don't need to leave the place where we live our ordinary life, we don't need to make an appointment or buy an expensive ticket. On the contrary, the Lord comes to be with us, to walk with us the path of life, to share our joys and our trials, and to help us to get through them all until we come to share his own victory.

He accompanies us as we are, even if we are living in a second union marriage, or if we are gay. He accompanies us whether we are unionist or a republican, a member of the labour party or of the conservative party; whether we are rich or poor, educated or simple, healthy, disabled or sick. The Lord comes to be with us as we are, and not as we dream we should be, or even as the Lord desire to see us become. The Lord is not a dreamer but someone who knows what the principle of reality is, someone who has his two feet firmly planted on the ground. He respects us and loves us as we are. He does not love our sins, but He loves the persons we are. We are all more than, greater than, our sins. God's compassion for us knows no limit.

The Lord is not afraid of our frailty. He comes to espouse the frailty of our humanity in order to share his divinity with us. His presence is not a punctual event. It is something which lasts. It is a companionship. This is not a matter of having been accorded an audience with Him for a few minutes as we might with someone powerful in this world.

The Lord's presence to us is an unceasing humble, loving and compassionate presence. He accompanies us day and night, day after day. The Lord is patient with us. He always hopes in us.

The Lord pitched his tent among us. This means that for the Lord we are more important than himself. Is this not a great lesson from the Lord for each one of us during this Christmas season? Jesus teaches us that we have to consider God as more important than ourselves and that in our relationship with others we have to give them the first place. It is easy to say this, but more difficult to put it into practice each day of our lives until the end. Perhaps this is the grace we stand in need of. May the Lord grant us the grace we need today to follow Him as he follows us, to stand beside our brothers and sisters in humanity as He stands beside us!