

Christmas Day
(Isaiah 52:7-10 / John 1:1-18)
25.12.2013

In the Latin translation of today's gospel – the famous Prologue of John's gospel – it is said that the word came to dwell in us, not just among us, but *in nobis: in us!*

This Latin translation with which we are familiar here at the monastery through the singing of the various Gregorian chants we use in our repertoire is truer to the original Greek than what we find in many English translations.

This affirmation which speaks of the Lord's coming to be *in us* introduces what becomes a strong theme in John's gospel: one which the evangelist will develop later on. We think, for example, of the following words John records Jesus to have spoken: *Make your home in me as I make mine in you.*

The point I want to make this morning is this: our celebration today should not be just a celebration of an event outside ourselves, the birth of the infant of Bethlehem two thousand years ago, but rather the celebration of a birth that takes place *in our lives, in us, 'in nobis'*, today.

We are called to be a word from God!

If only we grasped all the implications of that!

Can you just imagine the change for the better would be brought about in our lives, and, in and through us, in the life of the world if only we lived our lives as a word from God?

If we lived our lives each one of us a word from God, as men, women and children in whom God's word is made flesh, then I am sure the quality of the words we speak would be of much more value than they are at present.

There would be much less distance, much less disparity, between what we say and what we live. The words we speak, the words of promise we pronounce, such as: *I love you, I care for you, I will always be there for you* would be matched by our actions.

Let's be honest, how often we speak words that we don't really inhabit!
There are words which fall from our lips, but they do not come from within us.

Let's face it we have all spoken words we haven't matched up to.
We have professed beliefs that our lives have not always concurred with.
We have made promises which we have not always fulfilled.

We mightn't like to admit it, we may even try to deny it to the point of trying to convince even ourselves of our righteousness, but the truth is that so often the words we have spoken and the words we speak are but vain and empty words.

How often our words are insincere!
They flow from our lips, but they don't come from our hearts.
So many of the words we speak are thoughtless/senseless words.

In his Rule for Monks in which insists so strongly on truthful living, St Benedict puts great emphasis upon the fact that *our minds and hearts should be in accord with the words we pronounce with our lips.*

When the words spoken by us are not truly inhabited what so often results is pain and hurt, disappointment and deception ... what results is a break-down of confidence and trust ... and eventually strife and conflict.

Peace is forfeited, harmony is lost, concord is sacrificed.
Eventually relationships deteriorate and may even be irreparably damaged.
Relationships can just fall apart, when words one supposes to have been spoken earnestly are proved by un-matching attitudes to have been empty of substance, a mockery even.

In today's world think of the cause of many of the conflict situations around us. What you will discover to be at the base of on-going conflict will be a lack of dialogue in truth, a failure to engage in conversations based upon mutual respect.

In our own lives consider what is the cause of so many of the breakdowns we can experience in friendships and love relationships.

It is very often a failure to speak true words to one another and a failure to listen to one another in all honesty.

Separated couples couple will often say that things fell apart for them because they stopped communicating properly.

Let's admit it, we suffer because of our own infidelities and inconsistencies and we suffer because of others people's infidelities and inconsistencies in our regard.

We suffer because actions don't match words spoken. We suffer because promises made aren't kept. Quickly things can block.

Things can go into a downward spiral, a vicious circle can be formed from which we can find no exit.

Because of hurt caused by frequent let-downs and disappointments people can so lose trust in others' words that they themselves may clam up entirely. They may fail to speak words they should speak which could move things forward, if only they were spoken in an appropriate way: in truth and love ... as St Paul tells us the truth should always be spoken: in love.

I had a beautiful and yet very simple testimony in this regard last evening.

A former retreatant in the monastic guest-house (someone I had met a long while ago) sent me an e-mail to tell me that they had just had a conversation I had suggested they should have well over a year ago. This person had avoided touching on things in conversation with her sister for some years, things that needed to be talked about. Because of this lack of communication they found themselves caught in an on-going conflict. Having spoken to each other and listened to each other recently, the person who sent the e-mail shared how things had become unblocked between them and they could now move forward and restore their broken relationship.

The person who sent the e-mail to me explained something very significant when she said that she had come to realise that her sister was suffering from much hurt.

She came to see that the many hurtful words that had been addressed to her and which she had witnessed addressed to her and to others by her sister were spoken out of hurt. Quite literally *hurtful* words: words full of hurt.

Hurtful words spoken are frequently/usually *hurt-full* words: words spoken by people *full of hurt*. To realise this can help us a lot.

Think of where this kind of thing has led us to in the course of our personal histories and the history of our world.

One word barring into another, before you know it war is raging, relationships are broken off and shattered!

In that meeting room in Stormont Hotel gathered around the negotiating table with Richard Haas and Meghan O'Sullivan in recent days there will have been hurt people and their hurts will have

been dictating many of the uncompromising words they have spoken which have left us in the blocked situation we are in.

The same dynamics come into play in our families and communities.

Jesus who is the word made flesh comes into our lives today, He comes into the life of our world, to speak God's word to us: His word which is peace.

Not only does Jesus speak peace, St Paul tells us *He is our peace*.

Clearly Jesus concurs with the word He was sent to speak!

Not only did Jesus speak a message of peace and reconciliation, a message of love and life, *He is our peace and reconciliation, He is God's love which has come into the world, He is our life!*

It pertains to all God's messengers, it pertains to us, to concur with the words we speak.

It pertains to us to be men and women to be true to our word!

What a wonderful gift we would give to God and to others this Christmas (and to ourselves!) if only we were to strive to be more and more men, women and children true to our word.

I hear the Prologue of John's gospel addressed to us this Christmas morning as a call to live genuine, true, human communication.

That is, after all, who and what Christ is: God's human communication of Himself, His word made flesh ... God's word *in nobis*, in us!

The evangelist John clearly regarded Jesus as the ultimate communication of God.

The notion of divine communication through the person of Jesus was so real to John that he identified Jesus as simply *the Word*: the utterance of God.

Through His Word, Jesus, God came and He still comes towards us; God entered and He still enters into relationship with us.

Through His Word, Jesus, God is close to us, He holds us, He embraces us, He talks to us, He listens to us, He cares for us, He heals us, He consoles our broken hearts ...

He enters especially into all the expressions of personal communication that are associated with intimacy and love.

The hymn writer gets it in one when He says simply this: *Love is His Word*.

Yes, God's Word, Christ-Jesus, is love.

Let us welcome and live by that Word all the days of our lives.

That would make every day a Christmas day: a day of Christ's coming to be with us in this world!

Amen!