

CHRISTMAS 2007 HOMILY  
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The story is told about a couple who recently welcomed a new baby boy into their family. This couple also had a four year old daughter and they had told her that God had sent them this new baby to be part of their family. The little girl was very curious about her young brother and tried very hard to get to know him. One night when they were in the baby's room putting him to bed for the night the little girl asked her parents if she could stay alone with her little brother for a while. The parents were curious about why she would request this time alone with the baby. At first they resisted, but then they agreed and as they went out of the baby's room they left the door open a bit to keep an eye on whatever was going to happen. When they had left the little girl got as close as she could to her baby brother's crib and whispered to him "Baby, tell me what God is like because I am beginning to forget."

I think that the little girl was on to something. It can be so easy to forget what God is like.

- sometimes we get confused or overwhelmed by the experiences of our lives: the joys and the sorrows, the struggles and the triumphs; and we neglect to look for or to God in the midst of these experiences we forget what God is like;
- sometimes when our view is clouded by our sinfulness or the sinfulness of others: by harshness, dishonesty, unfaithfulness, abuse, self-centeredness, war and violence, we forget what God is like;

- sometimes we get immersed in consumerism or narcissism or selfishness, and we start to think it is all about us, we can forget what God is like;
- sometimes distracted by the need to succeed or the need to be perfect or the need to control our lives, we try to be our own “god” and there is no room for the other “God”, we can forget what that God is like;
- or sometimes we get thrown off by the lives of those who claim to believe in God but who live as if God did not exist and we forget what God is like.

It can be so easy to forget what God is like because we have never seen God face-to-face. And maybe that’s where Christmas comes in. For at Christmas we celebrate and remember that on a night like this one long ago God did come to us, he became one of us so that we could know what God is like. We could see him and touch him and hear him and relate to him.

Now everyone loves a baby but Jesus did not remain a baby. Like you and me he grew to be a youngster, a teenager, and young man, and finally a mature man. As a mature man he wanted people to take him seriously and to enter into an adult relationship with him. In the last three years of his life Jesus set out very purposefully on his mission to show us what God is like and to invite all people closer to God. He invited people to get to know him by spending time with him, by listening to his teaching, by watching how he acted and by sharing his life. And he challenged them to grow as holy, faithful, mature people. That challenge has never been easy nor is it something that comes easily to us if we just do what “comes naturally”. But Jesus taught, in fact he guaranteed, that if we do that, if we follow his way

of living human life, we will find the true meaning of life, we will be happy  
be happy and we will live forever.

Jesus never forced them into relationship. Jesus respected the freedom with which his Father had made each person and he left them free to accept or reject him and his teaching about the true meaning of life and the way to true happiness. That freedom with which God has gifted us and which Jesus deeply respects can baffle us especially when things happen that we cannot understand. “Why did God let that happen?” we ask. The answer is simple yet profound. God did not do that; other people did that or the mystery of sin and darkness all around us made that happen. God does not do evil or cause tragedy and illness. But God made all people free and does not take that gift away. In that we also learn something very important about God too.

The stories of Jesus that we reverence and listen to here and the nourishment of his own life that we share with one another in community also literally give us a taste of what God is like. They tangibly help us remember, in the midst of everything that might distract us, what God is really like. Tonight once again as we do each year we remember that it started with the birth of a baby, but that it went far beyond infancy. However tonight like the little girl in the story it might be time for us to say to him again “Little Baby, tell us what God is like because we are beginning to forget.”

And he will.

Merry Christmas!