

“Abba, Father.”⁶

The importance we attribute to this “becoming” can be seen through our attitudes about asceticism. Religious Life, like any passion or radical commitment, will always presuppose asceticism or choice, the ultimate sign of our humanity. Freedom and responsibility are major characteristics of our human condition.

You will find a new born child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger

Jesus, fruit of Mary’s womb, fruit of her faith and of her love; fruit of the Father’s Love, the visible face of His Love, Gift. The word “womb” comes back to me as a refrain: the Father’s, Mary’s, the Samaritan’s. A quote of Fabrice Hadjadj struck me by its stark opposition to the **incarnational** reality of “fruitfulness” both human and divine. “The devil has no womb. He doesn't welcome anyone in his heart since that person would be dearer to him than his own self.”⁷

You will find a new born child

This verb “will find” in the future tense keeps us on the move! It implies something in the present, a search or desire; a looking forward, a life lived in Hope, as Paul says to Titus. You will find, having sought Him out, having opened your heart and mind to the newness of God’s presence in your midst....in that “place” that is “apart,” but not separate or distant; a place of fruitfulness for ourselves and others.

You will find a new born child

May the WORD come down from heaven bestow beauty and fruitfulness on each of our lives. May it enrich and enlighten our joys and sorrows, hesitations and doubts, risk taking and future steps towards the fullness of Life which is ours thanks to the **Incarnation**.

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December 2010*

⁶ Ga 3:29 – 4:6.

⁷ Prions en Eglise. Commentary 17-09-2010.



INCARNATION... THE HUMANITY OF LOVE

We’ve all been heartless at times; the sad fact is that we can be “foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another.” Sometimes we hear that such behavior is the consequence of living in modern times, but the fact is, it’s as old as humanity itself. The description above is from Saint Paul’s letter to Titus, the letter we hear during the Midnight Mass of Christmas. But Paul doesn't stop with simply cataloguing human wickedness and bemoaning it. Rather, he opposes human heartlessness and evil with the power of the **Incarnation**, showing that nothing can stand in the way of “the kindness and love of God our Savior”:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.¹

Another way to put that is to say that Jesus is the humanity of love in the form of compassion.

¹ Titus 3: 4-7

Although we don't usually think of it as a "Christmas story," the parable of the Good Samaritan can serve as a beautiful ICON for the **Incarnation**, a way to understand what the Incarnation really means for all of us weak, often heartless, human beings. So here it is once again:

*A man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho fell into the hands of robbers and they left him half dead. A Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*²

As I said above, this story offers us an icon of the **Incarnation**. We see that the Samaritan, having really *seen* the half dead man, is seized with pity. What he saw with his eyes went to his "womb". In the French translation it reads: Having seen, he was seized in his womb. This is the turning point in the parable, the point of no return. What he saw... entered into him. In other words, the man whom he sees becomes himself. The wounded traveler becomes incarnate in the Samaritan. He takes flesh in him in that place where all that we call compassion, love, mercy and pity has its source. If we understand the Samaritan as a symbol of God, we can see that He became flesh out of compassion for our wounded humanity. Indeed Jesus was born like us in all things, but sin. Jesus is the human expression of God's love and compassion.³

To continue with Paul's message. In the Christmas liturgy we read :

God saved us through the water of **rebirth and renewal** by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having **the hope** of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves **to doing what is good**. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

² Luke 10: 30-35

³ Lafon, Guy. Table de l'Evangile, 13-07-1995

Paul seems to talk almost as a 'behaviorist,' encouraging Titus (and us) to do what is good, not to think about it or mull it over, not even to preach it....but just to do it. And he certainly writes as someone interested in the common good: Doing what is good is indeed "excellent and profitable for everyone."

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Every year Christmas brings "a new-born child," source of joy and hope. Additionally Paul introduces the notions of "rebirth" and "renewal." We can undoubtedly identify with these concepts. Newness is often attractive, but we also rejoice in and treasure second chances, even third and fourth ones: the joy after an eight day retreat, after an interesting session, after a serious illness or when forgiveness has been given and received in the course of our daily lives.

This feast of the **Incarnation** also makes me think about "humanization" something that we talked about at the CGP 2009 (future steps) and that I read about with some frequency in documents from both within and without the congregation. Christmas time might be a good moment to ask ourselves what "humanization" means for us. How exactly are our community and apostolic commitments helping us to grow in humanity?

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It's up to us now to protect that child who wants to live both inside and outside of ourselves; it's up to us to let him become a mature adult. This "new born Child" is better than we are? So much the better! Thus he calls us to grow with Him, to take on his size, to adjust ourselves to his measure which so exceeds our own.

Jean-Claude Lavigne, O.P. uses the word "humanization" several times in his recent book on religious life.⁵ In the chapter, "To Become Human Beings," he talks about "bringing to birth" our particular life-style as religious through the school of fraternity, of prayer, of going beyond one's ego and fears. Not surprisingly, attending such a "school" puts each person at the service "of a greater humanization." This "becoming" takes into account limitations and defects, but also assumes giving of one's best – to grow into the status of the Son who cries out,

⁴ Luke 2 : 10-12

⁵ Pour qu'ils aient la vie en abondance, Cerf, 2010.