

Advent 4A

This American decided to visit the Vatican when the Pope was out of town. On the Pope's desk He noticed a gold telephone and was told by a cardinal that it was a hot-line to God. When asked if he could place a call he was told it would set him back £10.000. On his way back to the States he decided to call at a parish in Kilkenny where his ancestors came from. On the Parish Priest's desk he also noticed a gold telephone and was told it was also a hotline to God. When asked what a call would cost, he was told 50p. That extraordinary he said the same call costs £10,000 in the Vatican. The PP responded: 'that's easily explained – you see over here it's a local call.'

Christmas means that Christ becomes localised – He is our Emmanuel – God with us. In some non-Christian religions, God cuts a very distant, remote figure. He is utterly transcendent, otherworldly. The Christian God shares our human condition in order to save us. His reassuring words to Mary and Joseph are also addressed to us: "Do not be afraid, I am with you".

Jesus becomes localised in a special way at Mass. He is present in the material elements of Bread and Wine and makes his home personally with us at Holy Communion time. He wants us to return the compliment when He says: 'make your home in me as I make mine in you'. That's one of the main reasons why we come to Mass.

But the question is; do we want Him to be that close to us? . On one occasion when he visited his home town of Nazareth, Jesus was given a very cool reception by the people He might have expected more from. If we keep Jesus at bay His loving plan for our lives might not be fully realised. When Adam and Even fell from grace they hid from God and His plan for the human race was frustrated. When people say that they don't believe in God, it could be that they just want to distance themselves from Him because they're not living as He taught.

The Christmas story tells us there was 'no room at the inn' for Mary and Joseph. Are their situations today where we distance ourselves from Jesus and his message? People rather facetiously say that the Church should keep out of the bedroom. But you could add to that, the classroom, the sickroom, the boardroom or any room for that matter? Have you noticed it's getting harder to find Christmas cards with a religious theme these days? This is the slippery slope of removing Christ from Christmas altogether. But those who call themselves Christians must not allow this to happen. One of the slogans associated with the Brexit debate is 'we want our country back'. Would not the same slogan, slightly altered strike a chord with the Christian masses today - 'we want our Christianity back'. If not the Christian faith could slip through our fingers like quick sand.

The Christian message proclaims loud and clear that the Son of God took on our human nature and became one of us. We become his willing partners in spreading His Kingdom of love and peace among our fellow humans. The Christmas story never lets us forget this.