

3 Sunday Advent A 2016
December 11
Frazee/Callaway

Today is a day when Advent meets Easter. At the Easter Vigil we proclaim that...things of heaven are wedded to those of earth, and divine to the human. Jesus Christ is Son of God and Son of Mary. He brings heaven to earth! So I ask...

Have you ever been to heaven?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes heaven as the *beatific vision*—that is to see God. Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the magi; they were in the presence of God; when they gazed at the face of the new-born Jesus they gazed at God.

For you and me, it is possible to gaze into the *manger* and see Jesus, now! Our manger is not in Bethlehem. It is here in this place. Our manger is the ambo and the altar. The swaddling cloths are the pages that hold the gospel and the corporal on which rests the chalice. These are not metaphors or mere symbols—I tell you Jesus is here. If Jesus is here we must be *in Heaven*.

This might be hard to accept. We don't hear the choirs of angels singing *Glory, Glory, Glory*. We might even be disappointed to concede that the Kingdom is here and now; is this all there is? We must make the leap of faith. We must see Jesus not where we want him to be, but where he is. He came to earth and lived amid sickness and sin. He gathered the lowly and meek. All that surrounded him...looked not like a kingdom, but it was! It was the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus is here—in His Gospel and in His Eucharist. He calls into his presence to be forgiven, instructed, nourished and sent. Our lack of enthusiasm does not diminish His presence. Our refusal to sing does not lessen His glory. Our inability to listen does not silence His word. Those who today dismiss his presence as mere religious nostalgia or even believe in him but find better things to do—they are not the first to set him aside or reject him. Jesus spent his life time rejected and finally crucified, for claiming to be what he is, the Son of God, in the flesh.

This, I suppose, is the difference between heaven and earth. On earth, no matter how many times we come to be with the Lord, our hearts can be divided. We want to be here, but we also want to be about our own lives. We want to live as his children, but we want also to play by our own rules. We want to sing his praise, but not with the voices he has given us. We want to bring him to the waiting world, but only when the mission is convenient and safe.

I have no doubt that, in this Eucharist, time and eternity meet, heaven and earth are united. Like John the Baptist, we continue to be plagued by questions of uncertainty: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Is this the Church to which we should belong, or should we look for another? Is this true worship, or should we look for some other?

Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

My friends, Heaven is here. Seldom do we come to realize the privilege it is for us to be here.

This Mass has the power and the grace to enliven our hope in Christ Jesus. The fruit of this encounter is a growing desire in us to be of service to all. This is our first and greatest Christmas gift; it is a gift that God gives to us and the gift we give to others: to give ourselves in service to all.