

27 December 2020—The 1st Sunday after Christmas: John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word! This is a sentence authors must cherish. What a splendid way to begin. To the ancients, a person's character and moral reliability were revealed through their word; this is the reason oath taking and oath breaking are such serious things in the Bible. What a contrast to our world; we *expect* words to be deceitful. If you doubt this, here are two examples which dominate our culture: politics and advertising.

The well-known words which begin John's Gospel communicate in poetic fashion that the authoritative, powerful Word has always been part of God, always revealing God, always bursting forth from God. This always divine, present, active, creating Word *was made flesh, and dwelt among us*.

Because the Word is the beginning, making all things, shattering darkness with Light, therefore every coming of the Word is a new beginning, a new creation, a new blast of Light into darkness, a new enfleshing of God love and presence.

This is important—not simply as a bit of Christmas theology, not just as something to think on as one calendar year gives way to another. We are God's new beginning; every Christian, every parish is a sign of the Word's never-ending incarnation.

How is the always-beginning Word beginning always anew with us? The answers are in today's Gospel.

First, we know that the birthing of the Word among us, is from God alone. Verses 12-13: we are God's children not from our families or through a human decision or by human will, but, as John proclaims, through the ecstatic outflowing fullness of God's grace. The actor in our new beginning is God. God invites each one to be born anew through his love, into people who reflect and magnify God's own true Word, Jesus Christ. All else is dependent upon and meant to serve this new beginning of God with us. All else is, at best, secondary.

The new beginning begins when we *receive him and believe in His Name*, states John. That is, when we welcome Christ as a guest. We know how to welcome guests: we invite them in to share our lives, our space. We make room for the guest, and adjust our time, our actions, and our attention to serve the guest. With a guest, we go the extra mile, making our wants correspond with the guest's desires. This is how we welcome Jesus, too. Welcoming the guest who is Jesus the Incarnate Word of God transforms us in every way; perhaps the most profound transformation involves our beginning to see that in welcoming the guest who is Jesus, we become willing guests in Christ's Kingdom. As we serve Jesus, we begin to see that Jesus has been serving us all along, that our ability to serve him is because he first serves us, our ability to love him is because he first loves us. And we begin to see that we also serve Christ as we serve our brothers and sisters, and the world God loves.

Our love for Jesus will naturally lead us to *bear witness*; that is, to share the Word. Our vocation as witnesses, or Word-bearers, is from beginning to end in John's Gospel.

Being a "Word-bearer": what a wonderful word-picture. A person's witness is one's testimony to the truth, our oath that what we are bearing witness to is not a lie, because we have personal experience of the matter. And we bear it. There's a verb packed with meaning: we carry the Word with us with purpose; it is not just inside us, not just a part of us: the Word is given us so we may give it away. We bear witness by offering others the gift of Christ, an offering of love, our love for Christ and our love for those whom Christ loves, that is, the world made through, in, and for Christ.

The Word is always beginning, always bringing Light into darkness, always revealing God's glory, always dwelling among us.

We are to continue being born into God's image and likeness through God's Incarnate Word, whom we receive, and through whom we abide in God. We welcome Christ and receive Christ. And we bear witness; we bear the Word to others. We invite others to come and see; we make a place in our lives for them, so they will make a place in their lives for Christ and be Christ's guest, too. We make real in our flesh, the Incarnate Word of God.

In the beginning was the Word...and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.... Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.