

# Christmas Day

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Preached December 25, 2017; St. Peter Catholic Church, The Dalles, Oregon

Today's Gospel draws back the veil of eternity and gives us a glimpse of the Word that was in the beginning with God, the Word that was God, the Word through whom all things were made.

As the Gospel continues we hear that this same *Word became flesh and dwelt among us, that we have beheld his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth*. Finally, we learn that while no one has ever seen God, this same eternal Word, God's only Son, Jesus Christ, has revealed him to us.

That is the splendid truth that is hidden in the simple child sleeping on Mary's breast. That is the light that has dawned. That light reveals God to us, but also reveals us to ourselves.

When John writes, *in the beginning was the Word* and tells us that through this Word all things were made, he is, among other things, telling us that all of creation derives from the supreme intelligence, knowledge, and wisdom of God. He is telling us that our own reasoning power, that gives us the power of thought and of speech, is but a distant reflection of the light of the eternal Word of God. He is telling us that we can find meaning and order in things, not because we put them there, but because they derive from the supreme meaning that is found in God himself.

This is hard for us to accept because we tend to think that flesh and blood is real, that deeds are real, but words, mere words, are empty. With this mindset, when we hear that *the Word was made flesh* we are inclined to think that some benefit was bestowed upon the poor Word, that now it has the dignity of being flesh, now from being a mere word, it has become real and substantial.

Actually we have it exactly backwards. Even our own thoughts are not so insubstantial as we make them out to be. Their tremendous power can be seen by all that the human mind has produced for good or ill. Just look at all the vast technological world we have produced; factories, airplanes, x-rays, atomic bombs, computers, missiles, cell phones, and submarines and so much more are all products of the human mind.

As the power of the human mind is made manifest in the things we have fashioned out of materials that God created, so the power of the divine mind is revealed in the whole universe, including ourselves, that he created out of no pre-existing thing.

When the Word became flesh, he gave to us a powerful reminder of the priority of the reasoning power in all of reality and in human life. It is our uniquely human

power of reason that makes us to be in the image of God and gives meaning dignity and importance to our flesh and the blood, not vice-versa.

We can not live without meaning: a life that is meaningless is a life devoid of hope, a life of despair, no life at all. Either we will give way to despair, or we will seek to fashion a meaning for ourselves, which is the way the world of post-modernism seeks to escape despair, or we will accept the meaning that comes not from us, but the Word and Meaning, that comes from God, the Word that is God.

Yet, we receive that word and meaning with the godlike power of reason that has been given to us, and we are to govern our fleshly lives not according to worldly and godless desires, but according to reason, illumined by faith.

This is of great importance because the modern age was, and I speak in the past tense, the so-called Age of Reason. Nevertheless, the reason of the Age of Reason was a reason that closed itself off from the fullness of reality and limited itself only to 'scientific reason', taking into consideration only what can be weighed, numbered, and measured.

The Age of Reason, by rejecting beforehand the consideration of any reality beyond the material, subject in some measure to its own control, made reason to become godless. Becoming godless reason removed the obstacles that impede us from the unrestrained pursuit of worldly desires, desires for pleasure, power, and prestige.

The Age of Reason has now come to an end and that is why we see all about us, in the shrillness of arguments, in the loudness of the shouting, in the name-calling, the slogans, and the hash tags, the denial of reason and the exaltation of godless and worldly desires.

Human reason, though, is a power that comes from God, a power that opens us to know the reality that he created, ourselves as part of that reality, and is even capable of attaining to the knowledge of God, the Creator. In essence reason is a power open to reality; when its scope is reduced to a small part of reality, as took place in the so called Age of Reason, the very dignity of reason is maimed. By becoming flesh the Word that was in the beginning, would actually heal our mind, bestow on us the gift of becoming children of God, and makes us capable once again of beholding reality in its fullness and himself, the author of all.

To live, then, a life in the flesh governed by reason is to live temperately, justly, and devoutly. That is the truly reasonable life that has been revealed to us in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. He has shown us how to live rightly as human beings and he has given us the power to do so.

All this about 'reason', what about love? Isn't it all about love? Godless and worldly desires may sometimes present us with the attraction of a false love, but they deny the substance and power of true love. True love requires that we love Jesus Christ

and the life that he has shown us; true love requires that we live temperately, justly, and devoutly. True love and right reason are as inseparable as the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable. The Word that was in the beginning is the Word that breathes love, not the false love of carnal passion, but the pure love of the Holy Spirit. This is the love that is witnessed in the poor manger of Bethlehem, in the child cradled in the arms of his most pure Mother and in St. Joseph, the silent guardian and witness of it all.