

Ecce Homo

We have just celebrated the birth of the Savior on Christmas. Angels sang on high and the earth was at peace as we looked at the tiny infant asleep in the manger. Very soon after the Christmas readings, however, we shift to longer story of who this baby is and what he is to become. We begin with the Prologue to John's Gospel and see that this infant was indeed God become human.

Born of a poor family from Galilee, we learn more and more about this child who is destined to save us from death. Therefore, it is important that we come to know Jesus of Nazareth in his human person. Remember that the world's full realization of Jesus as the Christ did not come until his death and resurrection. Before that, he was known in human terms (even though he had a divine nature as well as a human one) as Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Carpenter's son, Jesus the son of Mary, and so forth.

We have no written history of Jesus as he grew from about the age of twelve (that would be like a sixth grader today) when he is found with the elders in the temple to about the age of thirty when he begins his public ministry. Yet, for all of us, the years when we develop our identities are greatly affected by those years between twelve and thirty, or from the pre-teen years to adulthood.

Jesus went through his own development within a human family, with grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncle. Yet, we pay virtually no attention to those years. Even the evangelists omit those most formative years. In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius felt that those years were worth praying about.

It is impossible to know what Jesus knew and when he knew it. Some would have the boy Jesus performing little miracles for his friends. Some would say that his coming to understand himself was a gradual experience, much like our own. Whatever the case may be, we should come to know the person of Jesus of Nazareth in his human nature as well as his divine nature.

In his human life, Jesus would surely have spent a good deal of time in prayer, probably in the desert, listening, learning, paying attention to God's revelation to him. Surely he would have wanted to know more. Surely he had learned a great deal from his mother; but I believe he still had more to learn.

Jesus of Nazareth had to learn what he was about and what he felt God the Father expected of him and of us. He lived a life just as you and I do and he had to face temptations and evil and decisions and suffering. All those things we go through, He went through. And he did everything, not with the power of domination or violence. Jesus refused to buy into the commonly accepted ways that humans behaved and treated each other. He came armed only with the power of a radical love.

His entire ministry is built on love of the other. Charity is the foundation of all his ministry. Pope Benedict, in one of his letters says that the primary ministry of the Church is the practice of charity...LOVE. As disciples, the first thing we must practice

is love.

And not just selfish love, so that we love those who love us. Jesus insisted that we love those who hate us. That we love those who curse us. That we love those who would do us harm.

And not only that, he tells us we have to be willing to die for someone, and not just someone, but anyone. We must be willing to surrender our lives so that others can live. He who wishes to save his life will lose it. He who loses his life will save it. In Jesus' teaching I, and you, must be willing to die to our own self-interest so that others can benefit. The love Jesus asks us to practice is the most radical love.

As we move from the Christmas narrative, we should spend some time praying about the man Jesus who said, not "Worship Me" but "Follow Me." If you are like me, you tend to view the Risen Lord in his glory and pay little attention to the fact that he also had a human life for three decades. Let the unfolding of his story grab your attention as we move through the Christmas Season. Your prayer will be greatly enriched.

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