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THE GOSPEL TO THE YOUNG

THE BIRTH OF EXPECTATION

“The Word united himself with humanity without losing his divinity; he made himself small without losing anything of his greatness” (St. Augustine).

The Gospel of John, the last to be written and thus in some ways reflecting the maturity of the faith of the first Christian communities, sums up the mystery of Jesus in a phrase which is simple yet incomparably dense: **“The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14). A simple term is used: **Word**. In the field of human relationships, since we cannot read each other’s minds we can know each other only through communication. When someone says, *“I love you,”* this not only reveals the depths of the feelings of the person speaking but also makes a deep impression on the person listening and establishes a new and possibly definitive relationship.

Being limited creatures, we cannot know the infinite mystery of God. If he had not revealed it, we could not even have imagined that he could love us: “The only Son...has made him known” (John 1:18). And yet, unlike human relationships, in which the words could be empty of meaning and even a lie, when God wants to “speak to us” he does so in the most incredible way; he gives us what is most dear to him, his own Son: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son” (1 John 4:10). This is the very heart of our faith: saying that *God is Love* means that he is not isolated but a community of Persons, a Family, **Trinity**. For this reason the great news (the “Gospel”) is that he wanted to create us capable of loving and of being loved; he called to take part in his divine life as sons and daughters like Jesus Christ his Son.

■ **A beautiful expression of classical wisdom says:** *“Amor, aut similes invenit, aut similes facit”* (Love either finds those like itself or it makes them alike). Between God and us, weak and sinful creatures, there is an infinite abyss. But the Father wanted to overcome this abyss by sending his Son, as the greatest proof of his love, to share our life by becoming flesh in the virginal womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, and being born as an infant, frail and defenseless, in a manger in Bethlehem.

In a time of religious pluralism such as our own, one often hears it said: “In other religions too there is the idea of the divinity who becomes human.” Yes, but it is not the same thing, nor is it even close to the same thing – because, in the first place, outside the Christian faith this “incarnation” does not happen for the sake of love; in the second place, it does not happen in actual history but in the dimension of myth; and finally, it consists in a simple appearance in human form, without the fully taking on of all the consequences of our human condition, as, on the other hand, Jesus did. One of those most in love with Christ, St. Ignatius of Antioch, was so conscious of the danger of misunderstanding the incarnation in this way, that before his martyrdom he wrote in his marvelous letter to the Romans: “There are those who declare that Jesus Christ was only apparently a man and that he only apparently suffered.... If only the chains I wear for him were also only apparent!”

■ **In this marvelous plan** of God, human collaboration could not be lacking. Not because God is imperfect, but because his Love did not want to act without our response. In “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) we find a woman who left her own life completely open to the will of God: “Let it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). The Church has appreciated this collaboration so highly that it calls the annual celebration of the Incarnation the *solemnity of the Annunciation*. The “yes” of Mary was to be repeated throughout her whole life, even at the bitter and, in human terms, incomprehensible hour of the Cross, so that she became the mother of “the brothers and sisters of Jesus” (cf. Acts 1:14-15).

As the Salesian Family, faithful to Don Bosco, believing in the Incarnation of the Son of Gods leads us to take seriously that *“he made himself like us in everything except sin”* (cf. Heb 2:17; 4:15; Eucharistic Prayer IV), and therefore to appreciate everything that is human. It is not by chance that in the Mass of our father and founder we listen to the text from the letter to the Philippians: “Brothers and sisters, whatever is true,

whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (4:8). The Roman playwright Terence (+159 B.C.) could say: "I am a man: nothing that is human is foreign to me." We can go further and say: "I am a Christian, and nothing that is human is foreign to me, because it has been divinized in Jesus Christ." ■