

# IN THE MARKET PLACE

## Carolyn Green SHCJ

IN the Contemplatio of the Spiritual Exercises (237) we read that God cannot do enough to speak out God's love for us and is ever calling us to a fuller and better life. There follows the question: how can we respond to such a generous giver? During my thirty days retreat I can remember hoping that I would respond with great generosity but feeling definitely apprehensive about the end of the retreat when I would have to pick up the threads once more and face the reality of day to day life. Then, as now, it seems to me the important thing to remember is that God is Emmanuel, and to look for God within. If this search is authentic it will surely move us out naturally into the faith and justice of the market-place. For me this is an important part of the reality of the incarnation and I would like to pursue it.

To sharpen the focus I want to reflect on "what the Divine Persons are doing, namely, working out the most holy Incarnation" (Exx 108). I find it helpful to link this with "Make your home in me, as I make mine in you" (Jn 15:4). It is **God** becoming human for us; **God** making a home among us; **God** becoming human for **ME**; and making a home with **ME**. I want to pray that like Mary I can be responsive and receptive so that God's creative word can be at work in me and incarnate in my situation and surroundings.

The annunciation helps me to reflect that, like Mary, I am highly favoured, and called, as she was, to bring Christ into the world. The annunciation is a scene I have prayed over and heard read countless times and the temptation is not to take too much account of what is happening. God consulted with Mary and she was the first to touch Christ. What does it mean for me to say 'Yes' to the incarnate Christ in my surroundings? The SHCJ Constitutions state

For this is our mission, to help others to believe that Christ lives in them and in our world and to rejoice in God's presence [para 4].

We will all have experienced times when prayer was simply a question of hanging in there. What do we expect? What we get is very often ordinariness and yet ordinariness is mainly what life is about. Instead of being paralysed by this I try to pray that God is there, calling me on... that I don't have to do it all myself ("Do not be afraid, God is with you")... that it isn't anything great I am being asked, rather to do the ordinary because God is in the ordinary, the everyday.

It is one thing to **say** something like this, quite another to actually live it out. How can I conceive and bear Christ in my own situation - in Oxford, Dublin, Lagos, Washington...; in conference centre, school, prison, hospital...? I have to ask for the grace to be empowered and encouraged. Sometimes I feel that situations need to be transformed. This is not something I can or indeed need to do on my own, but rather with and through God. Very often it is not so much a question of doing but of being; who I am rather than what I do. Recently someone attending a conference here broke down and cried her heart out because she was terrified people would ask her what she did. She explained to me that she 'only' did voluntary work a few times a week in a hospital canteen. She went on to say that she had been doing this now for six months - longer than she had managed to stay at anything for about ten years; for this woman suffers from severe depression and has been in and out of hospital. She

talked about how she felt a failure, how she had not lived up to the expectation of her parents; had thrown up a promising career.. and so the painful story continued. At one point she looked at me in desperation and said "I've got a Faith that is supposed to help me.. but it doesn't." We talked some more, she cried some more; I think she left a little strengthened and a little more confident about the future.. The reality of the incarnation?

As I said earlier, if the search for God is authentic it will surely drive us out naturally into the faith and justice of the market-place. In one of the post-resurrection narratives when the risen Christ appeared to Mary Magdalen in the garden she was genuinely upset. Her world seemed to have come to an end: the one she loved was dead. How was she to go on without him? He was 'her' lord. She loved much; she grieved much. She did not recognise him at first, and it is the same for me. I must look for Christ in the people, events and circumstances of daily life. There is a great depth of love and meaning in Christ's 'Mary' and her 'Rabboni - Master'. (And what is my response to Christ?) Christ then tells Mary not to cling to him but to go and share her news with the disciples. There is a message for me here, a question perhaps - how to hold on to what I have been given, blessed with, in the way of intimacy with Christ; how to further and deepen this and at the same time how to share it with others? Again, this for me is very much part of the reality of the incarnation.

God is present for me in what I like to call the delicate touches of life - those precious moments which I treasure and can probably count on one hand. God is also present in the pain and suffering of those around me (not forgetting my own pain and suffering) and sometimes this can threaten to overwhelm me. When that happens I find it helpful, if I can, to ease up, to adopt a less formal approach, maybe to sit on 'my rock by the sea', or if that is not possible, just to sit on the side of my bed and quietly think, reflect, pray. Somehow quietening down helps to put things back into perspective and I can be 'easy' once more in the presence of God. Cornelia's words can be helpful too

Sit in silence before Our Lord and be more ready to listen than to talk [D63:66].

There is the desire to serve, to give, to do, to set my heart on Christ's kingdom first, but I know that for me it is important to allow time just to be. This being also involves giving myself permission to be dependent on God, realising that all that I have and am is sheer gift. It means acknowledging my need to spend time with God. The good thing about being 'at home' is that there is no need to put up a front - and so it is when I 'make my home in God' as he makes his home in me'. Time set aside purely for me could be seen as selfish but perhaps it is not so much selfish as necessary. Very often in our ministries we have to take on board so much of other people's lives, the ups and downs, the crises, the criticisms - I have heard myself saying "What about me? What about us?" It is surely legitimate to take time if we are to be truly disciples; if we are to live out the reality of the incarnation in the faith and justice of the market-place. As it says in the contemplatio of the Spiritual Exercises (Fleming's translation) 'we are ever being called to a fuller and better life'. What is our response to this? How can what we have received 'flow out to others'?

This brings to my mind the image of living water (Jn 4) - a spring bubbling gently at the centre of my being, gradually rising within me, flowing throughout my entire self, a fresh, cleansing energy of life. There have been periods in my life when I felt as though I was marking time, just doing enough to get by, with no great enthusiasm for anything, just wanting to get to the next thing to be done; no time for people or events, just a smooth running

machine, an efficient organisation. However, like the woman at the well, I too thirst for God and must go to the deep spring within myself to meet and to discover the living water, the spirit of Jesus. This is summed up for me in the following extract

.. our prayer, when authentic, comes to its completion and fulfilment in our total commitment to service of others. In turn, our service of others draws us back to God in prayer with **renewed enthusiasm** to receive again those gifts essential for our greater cooperation with Christ in the on-going creation and renewal of our world... In touch with God, everything we do is touched by God.

(Take and Receive series - Birth p 133)

Finally, it seems to me that in testifying to my own reality I will witness to the reality of Jesus still alive in the world today. I have to reveal myself in my giving. It is being present to others that nourishes and testifies to the Presence that gives life to all. My aim might be a quiet communication of personal experience. It is my real encounter with Jesus which will make it possible for those I meet to have their own experience of Jesus alive. I have experienced life - the reality of the incarnation - and I must witness to what that is for me. Some kind of response seems called for - response to the overwhelming generosity of God. My prayer could be to make a 'loving response' (Veltri's phrase for humility) with fidelity and in a spirit of loving concern. This is an act of the heart, and so I ask God to fill up what is lacking, so that I may truly come to know God in the here and now of daily life and to recognise the reality of God incarnate in every person and situation. It was "through suffering and joy" that Cornelia "learned to love God and the world he came to consecrate, with an undivided heart". I too experience suffering and joy as I struggle to make known the reality of the incarnation. It is surely worthwhile.

# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

**Karen Gosser SHCJ**

IN the months since I was asked to do some reflecting on this topic, I've found myself asking again: just what does the reality of the incarnation say to me about who God is, and who we are as human beings? I found myself pondering these questions from the perspective of the context in which I spend my days.

I work with women and men whose lives have been ravaged by the effects of alcohol and drug addiction, as well as by all the associated problems that accompany addiction. The pain of family violence, sexual abuse, childhood trauma, sustained at the hands of the generation of alcoholics/addicts that preceded them, is frequently found to be throbbing behind chemical dependency. Guilt and shame and loss and grief are emotions that are never far from the surface for the recovering person who is facing the 'wreckage' of his or her past. This 'wreckage', more often than not, includes all manner of compromise and dishonesty in human interactions and relationships. In short, my days are spent with people who are in need of hope, healing, and reconciliation with themselves and others.

Not long ago a client in one of the therapy groups I facilitate was beginning to work through some very painful memories she had managed to keep at bay through her chemical use. She said to the group that night, "Sometimes I don't think I'll ever be able to get through this stuff [memories of childhood abuse]; then I think there are others who've dealt with this and gotten to the other side. I think I can do it, if I know .. I'm not alone."

I believe that the reality of the incarnation asserts that God has not left us alone. The incarnation speaks first of all of God's enduring commitment to humanity and indeed to all creation. This commitment manifests itself in God's choice to enter into the human reality in all its potential, as well as limitation and messiness. This God, enfleshed in time and history, knows the human experience from the inside.

Without the benefit of Raymond Brown's insight into the 'minigospel' nature of the infancy narratives, Cornelia was able to grasp that the essence and unfolding of the mystery of the incarnation was contained in the life of the Holy Child. In the infancy and childhood of Jesus, God is already identifying with the 'least ones'. As a child, God is utterly dependent on the care, or lack thereof, of the community into which he was born. The child brings joy and hope not only to the immediate family but to those beyond the bonds of the family (the Magi). At the same time the vulnerable child poses a threat to the existing status quo. Only Joseph's correspondence with the promptings of God's spirit keeps the threatened Child from Herod's massacre. This Child is a mystery, not always understood, who in the humble, hidden life of Nazareth grows in wisdom, age and grace. The very fact that God has chosen to dwell among us, share our human experience, struggles as well as joys, is a manifestation of God who desires to 'be with'; it is manifestation, as Cornelia reminds us, of God's mercy and boundless love.

This mercy and boundless love become ever more concrete as the incarna-