

Mother of God 1/1/26

Sr Verna Holyhead has a wonderful phrase in her commentary on the readings of Sunday the fourth week of Easter, year C:

'We can say nothing more moving about human beings than that they call each other to life.'

Jesus is born to an isolated family unit in a stable or a cave far from their immediate relatives and friends and yet already God's call through them to others is at work, from the richest to the most poor, from the local shepherds to the gentile strangers of other lands. And it is not of their own doing. This is God blessing others through them as Jesus is a blessing to Mary and Joseph. We seek to be part of this blessing at the beginning of a new year for without it life looks bleak – a series of seemingly unconnected events which threaten rather than bless us, life enslaved to the other forces mostly beyond our control. It's the first step not in wresting back that control for ourselves – the mistake of its largely pagan celebration, but of surrendering that control to a benign power who seeks only our good, to a God who loves us and wishes only to bless us. This isn't a recipe for a trouble-free life, but for meaning in a life that necessarily assails us with trouble – it's the nature of the thing, perhaps of the only possibility of life at all. In this sense it's what gives life its meaning. Jesus doesn't save us from this, indeed he will drink its suffering to the dregs, but he does so as a blessing for others, for us. The shepherds and the kings and soon the elderly such as Simeon and Anna, and even the learned men of the Temple, will be drawn into this network of blessing, to be enlightened, uplifted, turned around so as to become blessings in their turn for others. Pope Francis was partly aware of this centring and de-centring role of ritual blessing, of, in his own words, 'creating agency for the Spirit by centring on Christ'. It's an agency that takes away that fear which so often assails us in meeting them, especially the stranger, or the one we imagine as strange, as our enemy, only to find in meeting them, perhaps after many meetings, that they are as human as you and I. Blessing them as a de-centring of self so that others may become part of whom we are, part of that great network which knows no boundaries and makes us all children of God able to address God as Abba and each other as sisters and brothers – in Christ, knowingly, or not. This is to celebrate Mary indeed as Mother of God, as Mother of all that unites rather than divides us, of all that gives life.

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