

Christmas Message

THE WORD

Year B • 25 December 2023

CRAZY LOVE MATTHEW 1:1-25; LUKE 2:1-14; JOHN 1:1-18

It's exactly 20 years since Beyoncé released her hit song 'Crazy in Love.' According to Beyoncé, the song talks about how, when you are falling in love, you do things that are out of character and you do not really care because you are more open-minded. The lyrics refer to a state of romantic obsession.

Crazy in love means you are prepared to do crazy things for the person or people you love.

More than two centuries before Beyoncé's single, an Italian preacher used the same language to talk about God. The preacher was St Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Redemptorists. He used the phrase "Pazzo per amore" to describe God's love for humanity. "Pazzo per amore" means "crazy with love." According to Alphonsus, God doesn't just love humanity, God is crazy with love for humanity, so crazy he sent his own Son to show us the way to salvation.

Alphonsus used the crib as a symbol of God's love. The crib speaks of a God who became human in order to identify with and be close to humanity. It's a reminder that God chose to be born, not in a palace or a 5-star hotel, but in a backward place, among the poorest people, the shepherds and goatherds, in order to show that his love embraces everyone, especially the poor.

Some are uncomfortable with this kind of language. They struggle to accept that God could possibly love them - weak and sinful as they think they are, and unworthy of God's affection. They find it hard to accept that they could possibly be created in God's very own image.

Others may have given up on God, or struggle to find evidence of the incarnate or the transcendent. If there is a creator, they see that creator as distant and uninterested.

Still others may have grown up with an understanding of God as a difficult taskmaster, always waiting to catch them out, eager to pounce when they do wrong.

This is something St Alphonsus struggled with himself. As a child, he was taught to see God as a harsh judge, someone remote and to be feared. It left him full of scruples and anxiety, a tortured soul.

Slowly, Alphonsus began to alter his image of God. He began to see God not as a distant judge, eager to condemn, but as a concerned parent, in love with humanity. And he began to preach and write about this crazy love of God, using the kind of effusive language that leaves Beyoncé's lyrics in the shade.

This crazy love of God is the good news of Christmas. God loves us - all of us - crazily, madly, deeply. No matter what we do or don't do, whether we are religious or not, whether we believe in God or are full of doubts, God loves each of us with an ineffable love. That is the truth of our faith, of this season.

That is the meaning of the crib. ■



DO

Visit the crib in your local church, and think about its meaning and significance.

PRAY

Pray for all who find it hard to believe in God or to accept that God loves them.

SAY

"Lord, give me the faith always to make you present to all those I encounter. Amen."

LEARN

"God's becoming man is a great mystery. But the reason for all this is his love, a love which is grace, generosity, a desire to draw near, a love which does not hesitate to offer itself in sacrifice for the beloved." Pope Francis

The extent to which we are cherished by God is one of the most amazing teachings of our Christian faith. Our challenge is to let this love of God that we celebrate at Christmas shape the way we live our lives, and guide us in our works of love for others.

REFLECT

Christmas tells us three things about love. The first is that God loves us unconditionally, as St Alphonsus preached. The people of Israel believed in a God who responded to their prayers, who loved them so much he would come to save them. That God has come in Jesus. The incarnation is proof of the extent of God's love.

Second, God is one with us. God doesn't love us from a distance, but has entered fully into our humanity - its frailty, its darkness, its joys, its sorrows, its ups and downs, every aspect of the human condition. God has identified

with us, even and especially with the weakest among us.

Jesus wasn't born in the Bethlehem Hilton - but in squalor in a shed. Jesus wasn't born into high society - but into an ordinary family, forced to move around in search of work and sanctuary, on a lower rung of the social ladder.

Jesus wasn't born in Rome, where political power and influence lay - but in what was an obscure country on the Eastern fringes of a vast empire. Born a nobody so as to experience the fullness of humanity. Christmas tells us that God knows from the inside what it's like to be human.

Third, Christmas urges us to be Christ to others; to be Christ in our time and place, so that when people look at us, they see Christ. That's what the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul do - by their actions they make God visible in our world.

And that's our challenge today and always: to be Christ to others; that in what we do, what we say, the attitudes we have, the values we hold, the example we give, the love we show, we are Emmanuel, God-with-us, to all we meet.

We celebrate God's crazy love by returning it as best we can. ■

MASS DURING THE NIGHT**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

The Lord said to me: You are my Son.
It is I who have begotten you this day.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who have made this most sacred night
radiant with the splendour of the true light,
grant, we pray, that we, who have known the
mysteries of his light on earth,
may also delight in his gladness in heaven.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 9:1-7

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

PSALM

Psalm 95: 1-3, 11-13

Response:

Today a saviour has been born to us; he is
Christ the Lord.

SECOND READING

Titus 2:11-14

A reading from the letter of St Paul to Titus.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! I bring you news of great joy:
today a saviour has been born to us, Christ
the Lord. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 2:1-14

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Luke.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day

in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the oblation of this day's feast
be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray,
that through this most holy exchange
we may be found in the likeness of Christ,
in whom our nature is united to you.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Word became flesh, and we have seen
his glory.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God,
that we, who are gladdened by participation
in the feast of our Redeemer's Nativity,
may through an honourable way of life
become worthy of union with him.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

MASS AT DAWN**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Today a light will shine upon us, for the Lord
is born for us;
and he will be called Wondrous God,
Prince of peace, Father of future ages:
and his reign will be without end.

COLLECT

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, as we are bathed in the new radiance of
your incarnate Word,
the light of faith, which illumines our minds,
may also shine through in our deeds.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 62:11-12

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

PSALM

Psalm 96: 1, 6, 11-12

Response:

This day new light will shine upon the earth:
the Lord is born for us.

SECOND READING

Titus 3:4-7

A reading from the letter of St Paul to Titus.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! Glory to God in the highest
heaven,
and peace to men who enjoy his favour.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 2:15-20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Luke.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May our offerings be worthy, we pray, O Lord,
of the mysteries of the Nativity this day,

that, just as Christ was born a man and also
shone forth as God,
so these earthly gifts may confer on us what
is divine.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Rejoice, O Daughter Sion; lift up praise,
Daughter Jerusalem:
Behold, your King will come, the Holy One
and Saviour of the world.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant us, Lord, as we honour with joyful
devotion
the Nativity of your Son,
that we may come to know with fullness of
faith
the hidden depths of this mystery
and to love them ever more and more.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MASS DURING THE DAY**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

A child is born for us, and a son is given to us;
his sceptre of power rests upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called Messenger of great
counsel.

COLLECT

O God, who wonderfully created the dignity
of human nature
and still more wonderfully restored it,
grant, we pray,
that we may share in the divinity of Christ,
who humbled himself to share in our
humanity.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 52:7-10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

PSALM

Psalm 97:1-6

Response:

All the ends of the earth have seen the
salvation of our God.

SECOND READING

Hebrews 1:1-6

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! A hallowed day has dawned
upon us.
Come, you nations, worship the Lord,
for today a great light has shone down upon
the earth. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

John 1:1-18

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
John.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Make acceptable, O Lord, our oblation on this
solemn day,
when you manifested the reconciliation
that makes us wholly pleasing in your sight
and inaugurated for us the fullness of divine
worship.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

All the ends of the earth have seen the
salvation of our God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant, O merciful God,
that, just as the Saviour of the world, born
this day,
is the author of divine generation for us,
so he may be the giver even of immortality.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.