

Christmas 2010

Fr. Bob VerEecke, S.J.

Each year as I prepare my Christmas homily, I try to find a carol whose text conveys the message that I would most like to share with you at this beautiful season of the year.

The carol that has caught my imagination this year is the one we just sang a few minutes ago: "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice." Do you remember the words? *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice with heart and soul and voice! O give heed to what we say, Jesus Christ is born today!*

This carol dates back to the 14th Century with a Latin text "In Dulci Jubilo." Or in English: "With Sweet Rejoicing!" It has a fascinating history. It was composed by a Dominican priest and mystic who had a vision of angels who invited him to dance with them. Now you know why I am partial to it!

These are his words:

Now this same angel came up to the Servant (Suso) brightly, and said that God had sent him down to him, to bring him heavenly joys amid his sufferings; adding that he must cast off all his sorrows from his mind and bear them company, and that he must also dance with them in heavenly fashion. Then they drew the Servant by the hand into the dance, and the youth began a joyous song about the infant Jesus...

These were the words:

In sweet rejoicing, now sing and be glad! Our hearts' joy lies in the manger; And he shines like the sun in his mother's lap. You are the alpha and omega!

How Sweet it is! Suso's vision enabled him to rejoice with heart and soul and voice, to be free at least for a time of the burdens and sufferings of his life. In this vision of the child in the manger in his mother's lap Suso saw the tenderness of God. He knew that God desired to enter into this falling, failing, fallen world and be not just a part of it but its life, its sweetness and its hope. And how sweet it is! Jesus Christ is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. This reminds us of the Easter vigil and the lighting of the Easter candle!

Now if sweet is not your thing, even on this Christmas eve/night/day, how about savory? How about spicy? What is the flavor of this Christmas eve/day for you and your loved ones? Our celebration of Christmas, our wonder at God's love at this time of the year, is not to throw salt on the wounds of our humanity but rather to enrich our human

experience, to spice it up so to speak so that we may recognize our share in God's life through Jesus Christ.

Whether we sing the old Latin/German verses "in Dulci Jubilo" or the English version, "Good Christian Friends, rejoice," the song invites us to Rejoice with heart and soul and voice.

Amidst all the difficult challenges in our world, the conflicts and divisions that create a world where "peace on earth, good will to all" is an exception rather than the rule, we are reminded that our God has entered into our human experience with "heart and soul and voice." The Eternal Word has become flesh. God dwells with us now and forever in Jesus Christ. God has embraced our humanity with all of its fragility. As the song continues, "Now we need not fear the grave, Jesus Christ has come to save!"

As Mary embraces her child, holds him in her arms, so God embraces us, gives us the promise of endless bliss. A little now, and for all eternity: How sweet it is! Savor the moment!