

Christmas Homily 2006

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I'm sure that each of you has a favorite Christmas song that speaks to you of the meaning of the season. What would Christmas be without music, without those joyful, high energy carols that make your heart sing? I love the joyful songs of this season, but there's also a part of me that loves the *haunting* Christmas songs, the ones in minor key.

One of my favorite Christmas songs is an old Appalachian carol called *I Wonder as I Wander*. Maybe you've heard it before, although it doesn't get much play on the radio. [*I wonder as I wander out under the sky – how Jesus the savior did come for to die . . .*] The song has haunted me since I was a little kid listening to my parents old Firestone Christmas LPs. Those haunting carols never fail to stir up in me the romance of Christmas - those quiet, still times when the big party is over and you can take a brisk walk outside under the stars or sit quietly by the Christmas tree and wonder at the beauty and mystery of it all. Maybe this is why so many people choose to “pop the question” and get engaged at Christmas time. Christmas can be very romantic.

Over the years I have come to believe that God is a hopeless romantic at heart, who is madly in love with us, and who longs to reveal himself to us in friendship. Jesuit spiritual writer William Barry says that “God can be defined as the vulnerable one who saves us by offering us friendship.” I love this definition of God, and I have found it to be true, especially at Christmas time. God wants to be in a mutual, adult friendship with us. God wants us to be partners and companions in God's mission to create, redeem, and sanctify the world. This kind of adult, mutual relationship entails mutual vulnerability and openness. Of course being vulnerable is not easy. In saying “I love you” we risk rejection and humiliation. This is scary stuff. Lucky for us, God takes the first step.

God takes the risk of being the first to say the words “I love you.” God takes the risk of becoming totally open and vulnerable to us so that a friendship, or maybe even a romance, can blossom and grow. God comes to us as a tiny, vulnerable baby lying in a manger. This beautiful image of the Nativity foreshadows Jesus' death. The vulnerable baby lying in the manger becomes the vulnerable man hanging on the cross. From womb to tomb, Jesus is the vulnerable one who will stop at nothing to speak to us of God's desire for our friendship and companionship.

If the season of Advent is a time to let go of the year's past hurts, bitterness, and disappointments that tempt our hearts to stay closed and guarded, then Christmas is the time to risk becoming vulnerable again. Christmas is the time to really believe that love is possible. God's vulnerability at Christmas time invites us to respond by opening our hearts and believing in love once again.

Nothing is more magical than a heart that has become vulnerable to another person – not snow on Christmas eve, not twinkling lights and starry skies, not haunting Christmas carols, not even the faces of little children on Christmas morning. *Nothing* is more magical than a heart that has become vulnerable to believe once again in the promise and possibilities of love. And that's what we see when we look in the manger or on the cross - the vulnerable heart of God calling us to mutual friendship and maybe even a little romance. It's magical. It's the magic of Christmas.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.

For poor orn'ry people like you and like I,

I wonder as I wander . . . out under the sky.