

## ***Incarnation and Redemption***

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

**O**ne of the significant realities that we celebrate on Christmas Day and throughout the entire Christmas season is the theological manifestation of God becoming incarnate. Jesus became flesh in our world. Not a disembodied spirit. Not a god from Mount Olympus pretending to be a human being in order to cause mischief. No, what we celebrate and ponder these days is much more important. Divinity joins with humanity in the person of Jesus, the Word of God.

In this unitive, creative act of God, what we proclaim as we celebrate is an astonishing and a hopeful declaration of faith. We proclaim that what was seemingly divided is now made one. Humanity and divinity are united again as God intended in his creation. God is not something or someone that is “outside” our human experience but is rather “inside” the human family. What is seemingly separate from humanity is forever restored to a relational unity, a bonding between God and humankind in a manner that is intended to be eternal and everlasting.

As people of faith, we identify this new reality as redemptive. We proclaim that the birth of Jesus is the birth of our Redeemer. Not just big words and heady thoughts. When we confess this bold statement, we affirm, in



*Madonna and Child* by Antonio Balestra (1666–1740), Pavia, Italy / Shutterstock

faith, a miracle of God's life and love. But from what have we been redeemed? What has been knitted together that was once supposedly separated, torn apart?

In truth, according to a strong and classical tradition of theology, no real separation between God and humanity took place. The perception of such a separation was an arrogant act of foolishness. It was not unlike a temper tantrum children throw when they first try to impose their perceived independence on their parents: "I don't need you, and you can't make me!"

Human beings, indeed, all of creation, cannot truly be separated from God. God is the force, the animating energy, the creative power that creates, enables, and sustains all life. If we deny this reality or refuse to accept it, our refusal does not alter the truth but rather enables us to turn a blind eye to reality. This is the same kind of blind eye that children routinely play when they claim: "If I close my eyes, I can't see them, and they can't see me." Just as children are astonished when they are discovered in their hiding place, we also are surprised when our illusion of separation—our hiddenness—from God is revealed when God stands before us and calls us by name.

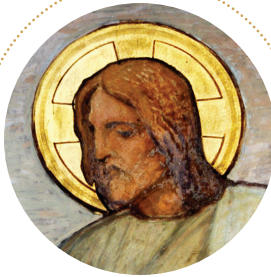
Redemption, then, is not so much repairing that which was torn apart but it is rather restoring our individual and collective vision that refused to clearly see the truth that was always present to us. Once we see, once our blind eye is healed and restored, we begin to live as people who are redeemed. This is the "already and the not yet" that we will celebrate as the liturgical year unfolds. We are already redeemed but we have not yet been fully redeemed.

Unfortunately, some still refuse to see. The kingdom of God is in our midst, but it has not yet been fully manifested.

I have recently been reading and have become inspired by a book that speaks about the emergent Christ. In this book, which deals with the reality of science and the challenge of faith, the author invites her readers to see the fullness of God as evolving. As Christians, we are called to grow and develop, we stretch, change, and evolve each day. Christians do not look back longingly to the past but rather try and live in the present and anticipate the future where all things will be made whole and entire. As I have often noted, a person struggling with scrupulosity needs to put extra effort into trying to live in the present moment. The "Eternal Now of God" is the only effective remedy for a disorder that pulls us back into a fearful past or propels us into an anxious future.

Moments that speak to us of healing, wholeness, new life, risk, creativity, and challenge are ways that the manifestation of the incarnate Christ becomes more present in our world. God is discovered wherever there is life, wherever there is growth, wherever human beings thrive and live life to the fullest. When we remember our shared history, we try and see the imprint of the hand of God at work in our world. We do not try and duplicate a moment long past, but rather we seek to make God's imprint alive and present in our world, in our place, and in our time. The grace of the moment is found in the present, the now, not in a distant past that has long since disappeared into the mist of time.

We should celebrate this Christmas season of grace. We should celebrate every relationship that



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we have been blessed with. We celebrate relationships because all of creation is in relationship with the rest of creation. We all share something of the same energy that comes from a loving and creative God and all of creation, no matter what form it might take, witnesses to the power of the God of life.

If we listen, if we pay attention, if we are willing to invest something of our self in every relationship that we experience, we will enjoy the fullest of God's

blessing and life. There is no thing, no person, no experience that cannot be accepted and experienced by the human person as gift, unless we choose to turn a blind eye and embrace an illusion that suggests otherwise. Be thankful and give praise to the Creator God who is the center of all life and whose Son Jesus the Christ we joyfully acknowledge and celebrate as God's gift to us, the pledge of God's life and love. ✨

## A Christmas Prayer and a Gift for You

*O sweet Child of Bethlehem,  
grant that we may share with all our hearts  
in this profound mystery of Christmas.  
Put into the hearts of men and women this peace  
for which they sometimes seek so desperately  
and which you alone can give to them.  
Help them to know one another better,  
and to live as brothers and sisters,  
children of the same Father.  
Reveal to them also your beauty, holiness, and purity.  
Awaken in their hearts  
love and gratitude for your infinite goodness.  
Join them all together in your love.  
And give us your heavenly peace.  
Amen.*

SAINT JOHN XXIII (1881–1963)



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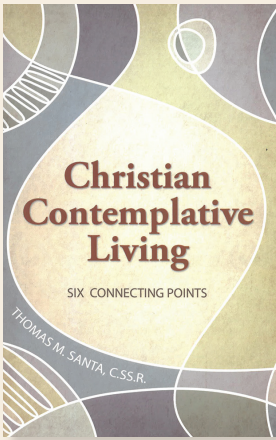
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**Q.** Whenever I go to the doctor, I am asked to take off my clothes for the examination. This makes me very uncomfortable. I am afraid that I am sinning, which is an even worse feeling than being naked.

**A.** Doctors know some people are uncomfortable with nudity. As a result, they routinely expose for examination only the part(s) of the body they need to see. This is not sexual or erotic; it is necessary for a proper examination. Regardless, nudity in front of a doctor is not a sin.

**Q.** What does it mean when someone states, "Conscience reigns supreme," or words to that effect? How can this be truthful?

**A.** Your individual conscience, informed to the best of your ability, is how you decide and discern a choice. Your conscience is your responsibility. It is not a license to make any decision that you might feel like but is, rather, reflective of the truth of how we have been created by God. A conscientious choice is always the best choice you can make.



## Christian Contemplative Living: Six Connecting Points

THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

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