

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on Keep *Incarnation* in Christmas

Date: December 7, 2025

Sunday: Second Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-13

By: Fr. Bob Schmitz

I refer to Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi Te, On Love for the Poor.

Text: There are now twelve movies in the Star Wars saga. Each begins: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." That beginning lets us slide into fantasy, into myth and magic. Over my years, I have noticed religion sometimes separates us from real-life engagement. And the events we celebrate this season took place so long ago, that we might forget their flesh-and-blood, in-time-and-place reality. Our faith can slide into fantasy, myth, and magic.

The feast of the Nativity celebrates the Incarnation, the truth that God lived in a body, God dwelled in the flesh. Jesus lived in a particular time and place. The Gospels give us just a few details about his youth. We know little about him until his ministry began. But the Scriptures hint that he grew up and came to adulthood much like all other people do. The reality keeps our faith from fantasy.

Today, we hear about John the Baptist. The people who assigned our readings skipped three words that indicate time and place. They skipped Matthew's words, "In those days." Matthew, however, set John in history so John could change history. John went to the wilderness, to the desert. Everyone in his day would recall how their ancestors wandered in that wilderness to prepare for the Promised Land. They would have asked John what God was preparing for them. John baptized in the Jordan River. They would recall that God dried up the Jordan just like God dried up the Red Sea, so God could liberate His people on dry land. So, they questioned John about their liberation. John's dress and habits had John looking like a prophet

of old. Prophecy had gone silent 400 years earlier. Its renewal said God was intervening in history. People hoped God would change history.

John preached conversion, a radical change to prepare for God-in-the-flesh. They had to produce “good fruit.” They were to seek the good, the truth, and righteousness, work for justice and peace; they were to be charitable and inclusive, to forgive and seek forgiveness. John expected real personal change AND social change. That’s why John got so upset with the leaders of his day, calling them a “brood of vipers.” You see, the political and religious leadership refused to make the faith real, to produce good fruit.

In Galatians, St. Paul coined an expression that some made into fantasy, into myth and magic. He wrote, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...” To us, “the fullness of time” sounds like good times. It sounds like John, Jesus, Mary and Joseph had it easy. We know better; they lived in very dark, difficult time. Mary and Joseph left Israel for Egypt because the vicious King Herod ordered the murder of the young male children around Bethlehem. When they returned, they moved to Galilee to be far from the authorities. For over 150 years, Rome oppressed Israel with its military might. In the time of Joseph and Mary, Rome’s policy was to tax Israel into poverty. Joseph was a carpenter. In his day, people measured wealth by one’s landholdings. An artisan with no land was poor. But he still had to pay the oppressive Romans. We also know how things transpired. The political and religious leadership martyred John, as they crucified Jesus a few years later. John and Jesus lived through difficult times, some of the worst. Nothing for fantasy or myth.

Even so, John, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus responded to their time. One commentary said they “supernaturally elevated [their] times.” Because real people cooperated with God, God

entered history, raising up humankind, offering us a new way of life. John, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus inspired a revolution of the heart, showing us how to live in self-giving love. When God came in the flesh, all humankind became supernaturally elevated through their lives of self-giving love.

The SUPERNATURAL ELEVATION OF TIME: keep the expression in your mind. Pope Leo's first Apostolic Exhortation called *Dilexi Te*, came available. The title translates *I have loved you*. You can sense John the Baptist behind the Pope's message. It is about our obligation to the poor. He writes, "Since the Church is called to identify with those who are least, there can be no room for doubt or for explanations which weaken so clear a message....We have to state without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor" (p. 29). Nothing, he says, exempts Christians from addressing the needs of the poor. And he repeats a few times that if the political and economic systems are not working on behalf of the poor, we have an obligation to change our politics and economics. Incarnation, God-in-the-flesh, situates faith in history to change history.

Study Pope Leo's writing because of John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph, and Jesus. Their times were not easy; nor are ours. They faced immense problems and threats; so do we. Yet, they supernaturally elevated their times through a revolution of the human heart. Incarnation means God of love comes into real life.