

12/25/17 Christmas, 2017

-- One of my favorite programs on PBS is *Finding your Roots*. On this program, famous people (actors, politicians, etc.) are given a chance to track their ancestries back as far as possible using a paper trail and even genetic testing.

-- Typically, along with great and courageous people, they will find some shady characters in their past. I suspect most of us would find the same thing if we would trace back our ancestries.

-- The series of Christmas readings has a total of a dozen passages from scripture, not including four psalms that are used. The very first gospel (Vigil) begins by tracing back Jesus' origins within Jewish history.

-- Of course, Matthew didn't have the resources we do now in genealogy, and we can't expect this to be a literal trail of 42 generations of men and women with hard-to-pronounce names. But it gives us the general idea that Jesus was in the greater tribe of Judah, connected to David's house.

-- More importantly, it tells us that, when God became human, God didn't descend from a pure line of saintly people. Along with heroes, we encounter scoundrels, adulterers, murderers and sexual abusers. And even some of the heroes also have some characteristics of scoundrels.

-- Nevertheless, the Word made Flesh descended from these very human people. And the first people who saw him were shepherds. They were not the romantic figures we see in a Nativity scene, but dirty men who were often regarded as thieves. Still, the Savior of the World came to them.

-- That's significant for us this Christmas time. For we all come from families who have exhibited some of the best and worst of human behavior. We belong to a Church which has a similar history.

-- Yet Christ comes to us. In the words of the 2nd reading of our night Mass, *The grace of God has appeared...as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.*

-- All of us come here today as people who are a mixture of virtue and sin, of noble deeds and petty insults. That is the human condition. The Word of God took on all of that human condition except sin.

-- God freely chose to be confined to a human body in a particular culture, speaking the language of that people and taking on their challenges. Jesus knew our human condition because he experienced it from the inside.

-- Today we do much more than celebrate the birth of a special baby. We come to rejoice that God knows our human condition and still loves us enough to send his Son to save us from sin and death.

-- And he sent his son, not as a grown up adult conquering hero, but as a child who grew up as any Hebrew child of that day. He cried, was hungry, learned things as any Jewish boy would have, and experienced all human emotions.

-- His family tree was as checkered as any of ours would be. Yet this fact made his saving power all the more authentic. As the book of Hebrews says, God speaks to us in a final way through his Son, who was with the Father at the creation of the universe.

-- We come into God's presence today, presenting ourselves with all our virtues and vices, yet confident that God loves us. Once again we call upon the savior of the world to train us to reject godless ways in order to live temperately and justly in this life.

-- For God has a greater life in store for us. Yes, our roots are a mixed bag. But so were those of the savior of the world. He saved us all, and we can certainly rejoice in his saving power this Christmas season. May all of you do so, and have a most blessed Christmas.