

HOMILY – XMAS DAY YEAR B (Homily 02)
“Christmas, God’s Great Self-Expression”
(Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18)

“These last days God has spoken to us through his own Son.”

Self-expression is a deep human need.

Follow Jesus and express yourself through love.

God’s self-expression is an eternal constant. For us it begins with creation. Some time back scientists released the ten top pictures of different parts of the universe taken by the Hubble telescope. They were amazing, mind-blowing pictures of stars and celestial phenomena – all part of God’s creative self-expression.

The covenants that God made with humanity over the centuries are a more intimate self-expression by God. With Adam and Eve, God made a covenant with a couple. With Noah, God made a covenant of love with a family. With Abraham, the covenant was with a tribe.

With Moses, the covenant was with a nation. That covenant included another self-expression by God, the Ten Commandments, ten words by which humanity could live God’s way of life.

What we celebrate today, the birth of Jesus, is a quantum leap beyond the previous expressions of God’s love. This would begin a new creation, far surpassing the first that the Hubble telescope can only glimpse.

Christmas is the beginning of a new covenant that would be centered on the sacrifice of Jesus own body and blood, the covenant that we celebrate now in the Eucharist.

In Jesus we also have a new commandment, the law of love that also far surpasses the old. It is no longer eye for eye or tooth for tooth – we are now to love as Jesus loved; to love even our enemies; to forgive those who hurt us, to do good to those who offend us.

Where psychologists suggest two options when confronting danger, fight or flight, Jesus offers us a third option – to forgive. That is truly an expression of God’s love, based on the ultimate expression of that love, the birth, life, death of Jesus and his resurrection to new life – that all began with Christmas.

An example of this new life is Abbot Anthony. This humble monk had a book of very fine parchment that was worth twenty shekels. It contained both the Old and New Testaments in full, and he read from it every day. One day a certain monk came to visit him. Seeing the book, he made off with it. The next day, when Abbot Anthony went to his Scripture reading and found the book missing, he knew the monk had taken it. Yet he did not send after him, fearing he might add the sin of lying to that of theft. Now the monk went into the city to sell the book and asked 18 shekels for it. The buyer said,

“Give me the book so that I may see if it is worth that much money.” With that, he took the book to Abbot Anthony and said, “Father, look at this book and tell me if it is worth as much as 18 shekels.” Anthony said, “Yes, it is a fine book and at 18 shekels, it is a bargain” So the buyer went back to the monk and said, “Here is your money. I showed the book to Fr. Anthony and he said it was worth 18 shekels.” The monk was stunned. “Was that all he said? Did he say nothing else?” “No, he did not say a word more than that,” replied the book-buyer. The monk then told him that he had changed his mind and didn’t want to sell the book after all. Then he went back to Abbot Anthony and begged him to take the book back, but Anthony said gently that he was giving it to him as a gift. But the monk told him that if he did not take it back, he would have no peace. After that, the monk stayed with Anthony for the rest of his life.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a sharing in God’s hug, God’s self-expression of love for us. The liturgy of the Word prepares us to receive that hug from God, communion through the body and blood of Jesus.

May this expression of God’s love for us strengthen us to follow Jesus and express our love for one another as God has loved us in Him.