

The Guest

Recently we have had a number of guests stay with the Dominican community in our priory. Without exception, these guests have all given rave reviews of the reception and the hospitality which they received there. One day at breakfast I was telling my provincial how happy my guests were, and he was certainly gratified. We both had to agree, however, that sometimes it takes an outsider to remind us of the good that so often gets overlooked in the humdrum of our daily routine. As the saying goes, “we can’t see the forest for the trees.”

These images roll around in my head as we begin the *Пиллиівка* – that is, the St. Philip’s fast which is intended to prepare us for the feasts of Christmastide. And those feasts are all about incarnation, when the Visitor *par excellence* comes to us to show us who we really are.

And what does this “Visitor” show us? He shows us how great is our potential. There are two Latin phrases which speak of this great potential. We are told that we are made *ad imaginem Dei* – that is, “toward the image of God”; in other words, we are like an unfinished icon which, as our “creation” moves toward completion, progressively takes on a closer resemblance to the God Who created us in the first place. We are intended to live so fully the life of the Trinity that we are transformed into visible and credible icons of the transcendent God. In fact, our likeness to God should grow to be so perfect, our unity with God so intimate, that we can say with St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me.” This brings us to the astounding Eastern Christian doctrine of “divinization” – *theosis* in Greek – which shows us how great is the “Christmas present” which God gives to us: “God Has become man so that man might become God”... and woman too!

This in turn brings us to our second Latin phrase: the human race is *capax Dei* – that is, capable of God. We’re talking potential here. The problem is that we are woefully far from living up to our full potential; the headlines prove this to us daily. Our lives often seem more diabolical than divine. How far we are from our divine potential becomes even clearer to us in comparison with Jesus, Whose humanity was lived out so perfectly that it became possible to see in Him the God who is His Father – and ours! His goodness made His contemporaries look bad in comparison. No wonder they wanted to kill Him! In their place, would we behave any better? After all, His shining divinity shows us up as well. Is that why we box Him out of our lives – except, of course, when we need the Divine Problem-Solver to get us out of some jam that we have created for ourselves?

In my community, we need visitors to come and show us who we really are. As such, we are typical of the human race and of the Church. Isn’t that why Jesus came? Doesn’t His coming force us to step back and re-examine who we are and what we are about? When a guest is coming, we make preparations so that everything might be ready for the anticipated arrival. To prepare, let us step back from the daily grind – and from the forest of artificial trees, the blur of parties, the crush of stores - to recognize and appreciate the implications of the coming of Christ: God with us, God like us. May such be our task this *Пиллиівка*.

Rev. Jim Karepin, OP