

Christmas Eve Prayer 2010



Prepared by the International Presentation Association

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Leader

We gather to celebrate Christmas, “the birth of smallness and service in the face of power and arrogance of the great of this world; an arrival accompanied by the smell of a manger” (Gustavo Gutierrez). As we gather we also remember the way Nano and the early Presentation communities celebrated Christmas. Nano understood that at its heart Christmas is about hospitality. God makes a home in the cosmos, in every bursting forth of life and welcomes every living thing to share the fullness of life in communion.

Reader 1

Hospitality has two aspects: being at home oneself and making another feel at home. There is an old saying: home is where the heart is. Home may be connected with certain physical surroundings, but location is not the focus of “being at home”. Any place can become home for us when our heart finds its rest there. When we make others feel at home, we have welcomed them in such a way that, by being with us, they find rest at their heart’s centre. Welcoming the other, welcoming the stranger, may often seem to put the focus only on the object of hospitality. But welcoming involves relationship. It takes two – the one being hospitable and the one receiving hospitality – and it is for both to experience that “home” is being shared because the hearts of both parties are involved.

David L Fleming SJ

Reader 2

Pius O’Farrell (p 86) refers to the works other than education carried out by Nano as “lantern work”. She says:

‘Lantern work’ was not a step to evangelisation but an early and essential part of evangelisation itself. Nano helped the sick and consoled the wretched. The essence of Nano’s social work was the caring process which fosters community. She added something – an indefinable warmth – to the social vision found in France. She added the leaven of deep compassion and joyful hospitality that reached its peak in her Christmas dinners.

Although often mentioned as a separate characteristic of the Presentation charism, hospitality is in reality an integral part of Nano’s commitment to those made poor and an expression of the quality of her relationship with them. What Andrew Hamilton SJ has said of Dorothy Day can also be said of Nano:



May we use our gifts with wisdom
and with courage,
celebrating our connectedness
and seeing the expressions
of your love everywhere throughout the cosmos.

May what we do rise out of a receptive heart and
be gentled
by how we are in all of our living.

May our deep listening to all that is
generate hospitality,
and our love bring us to communion.
We make our prayers in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Cf Judy Cannato



Mary Southard csj

Blessing

In an act of hospitality, one to another, hold hands or place your hands on the other’s shoulders and pray a blessing for each other.

Final Song

Sing together a Christmas Song that is known by the group.



Quiet Reflection

Everything the earth contains belongs to God: its fullness and all its rich resources ... the earth is God's body, God's bodiliness, the love-reality that is God become seeable and touchable and historically processive. That the world is the body of Brahman is a favourite theme of the eleventh-century Hindu mystic and theologian Ramanuja. In this earthiness of the divine, in its movements and moods and evolutions and rhythms, we may encounter God and touch and feel and follow. The earth's seasons, are they not seasons of the heart of God loving, conceiving, brooding, warming, life-giving and exploding into glory? ...



The earth is our mother, abiding source of life for all living things. Breathing, eating, drinking, we are ever nurtured at her breasts and in her womb. How does one relate to one's mother, and how does one repay a mother's gift? The earth is precious: to God and to us. The earth is precious in itself.

Samuel Ryan SJ

Let us Pray

Gracious God,
in every moment we live
in your expansive love and tender embrace.

All around us we behold your presence. All around
us and within us life emerges, fresh, new and
blessed.

May we continue to expand our lives
and our living,
and accept the challenge
and the responsibility
to be co-creators with you.

May we embrace all the gifts you have given
and use them well,
in love and for love.

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The practice of hospitality coloured her commitment to social action and to reflection on the situation of the poor. These were grounded in intimate familiarity with the battered faces and messy lives of people [Nano was in relationship with every day]. It was impossible there to idealise the poor or to think abstractly about justice.

We cannot help but be reminded of Jesus' story of the banquet to which all are invited as we read in the Annals of the first Christmas for Nano's newly formed religious congregation. They invited 50 beggars – the poorest of the poor from Cork's alleyways – to Christmas dinner and Nano herself waited on them and stood behind their chairs as they ate their Christmas meal. Nano, following in the footsteps of Jesus, engaged in the process of social reversal, bestowed favour upon those made poor and powerless and was a sign of hope that it was possible for all to be included as family in the Kin-dom of God. Not only did Nano, her first companions and our early Presentation foremothers preach the Kin-dom of God; they also embodied it in their own lives.

Reader 3

What Good News Do We have for the Poor This Christmas?

Born in a stable, hailed only by shepherds, offered in the temple as a child of poor parents, hunted by a bloodthirsty despot – Jesus from the beginning shares the lot of those on the extreme periphery, those who do not count for much.

To grasp the full meaning of Christmas perhaps we should go, at least in our minds and imagination, to the periphery of our world to find those most marginalised. They are many, indeed a majority. We marginalise them even further by the names that we give them ...

The Christmas event contains within itself a call to conversion, to change, for all Christians. It calls us to give witness in our lives to the truth we celebrate. It was a call to love, to brotherhood and sisterhood. Above all, he came to bring good news to the poor.

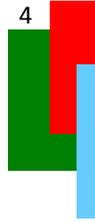


Noel Kerins, Columban Priest

Reader 4

Come
Christmas
in a barn, a shed,
a basement, a box, a cell,
a tunnel, a trench, behind a razor wire
fence, on a deck, a backwater,
a bench, a church step, amid the ruins of terror,
the cries of anguish, in a hospital tent,
beneath a star, round a tree, outside the expected,
from the debris of a shattered dream
we witness our divinity,
Love Irrepressible
Wellspring of Surprise
being born
of our
humanity
time and
time again.

Noel Davis



Reflection

Spend a few minutes reflecting on the readings. Then share any reflections you have about God being “at home” and Nano being “at home”; about others being welcomed by them to “feel at home”.

Quiet Reflection

Bumping Into God

God, I listened for the bells and trumpets
that I thought would herald your coming,
ready to bow down in awe at your presence.
But it didn't happen like that.
For a long time I waited, disappointed,
And all I felt was the beating of my empty
heart,
All I saw was the everyday world around me.
And all I heard were the ordinary sounds of life:



Birdsong and vacuum cleaners,
Traffic and the calling of children.
And then it came to me –
All of these things were filled with the divine.
You had sneaked up on me unawares,
And I was bumping into you all the time.

Let Us Pray

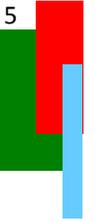
Maker of the universe, fashioner of the stars,
who dwells within time and beyond time,
hear this prayer:

if I have failed to perceive you
when you have appeared
in the face of a friend,
if I have neglected to feed you
when you have come
with the hunger of a stranger,
if I have not embraced you
when you have sought me out of
a sister or brother's poverty,
if I have not laughed and played with you
when you greeted me with the delight of a child,
forgive me.

Open my eyes, my hands, my arms, my heart
to know your appearing and to celebrate
the flesh-shaped mystery of Emmanuel,
God with us.

Make my heart a dwelling place ready to receive you
in even the bleakest spaces,
to delight at your appearing even as the animals
who made welcome for the birth of wonder.

Jan L Richardson



Avril Dover