

The Words of Christmas: Reaching Out

Wherever we stand on the newly translated Roman Missal, an important distinction remains between the language of prayer and the language of conversation. The language of prayer is distinct because those who gather for worship share a common faith. But if we try to reach out to people who are disconnected from the faith or to seekers who are not affiliated with a religious tradition, some of the words of worship will fail us in reaching out to others.



Our celebration of Christ's birth highlights two important words that we proclaim in the Creed: *consubstantial* and *incarnate*. These are hardly conversational words, especially for those who have not been awakened or connected to the faith we share. To talk about our faith with others, then, we need to be able to express in our own words what these terms mean. We do not need to "explain" the terms themselves, but we do need to be able to articulate why the meanings of these words are decisive for our human existence.

Consubstantial has two meanings. One is concerned with the unity of the three persons of the Trinity. The second, quite appropriate in this Christmas season, affirms that Christ is fully divine (one in being with God) **and** fully human (one in being with us). For Christ to be **incarnate** is much more profound than simply being born. The incarnation of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas speaks of God's indwelling within us through God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Use these reflection questions, based on these two words of Christmas, for personal meditation or in small groups. By responding to them, we can develop a language for reaching the unreached in faith, a language that may help others connect to the seeds of divinity that all humans share through God's generous gift of the Son, Jesus Christ.

- Why is it important in your life to be intimately connected to God's holiness?
- How does your relationship with Christ impact your behaviors and decisions?
- How do you perceive the signs of God's presence in the situations you face? In the people whom you meet?
- What are the stories about human life that have helped you recognize how closely we are connected to God's divine life?
- What happens to you when a sense of "mystery" or "holiness" is aroused in you?
- What are some of the longings, dreams, or hopes you have that lead you to recognize God's presence in your life? In the lives of others?
- What does it mean for you that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, dwells deep within you?
- How do you surrender to this Spirit so that Christ's presence may be perceived by others?
- How would you talk about questions like these with someone who is not connected strongly with our faith tradition?

Sometimes, words can get in the way or become an obstacle to understanding and perception. Yet, at other times, words can lead to new insight or can awaken a longing that someone has. At Christmas, let's remember that the Word of life is a person, and each of us has a capacity to share that living Word with others, as we develop a language that exposes this wonderful indwelling of God with us. Perhaps more importantly, beyond the language, we have been given the capacity to develop a way of living that matches what we proclaim and that can draw others to faith.