Hope and Joy

and sung by Joan Osborne has a haunting chorus that is bard-like and well worth our pondering: “What if God was one of us, just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus trying to make His way home?” I wonder if we, as Catholics, take this question seriously, if we really ponder God’s great plan to take on our human flesh. Perhaps if we did, we would better realize the hope and joy our lives in Christ bring into our world?

I have been reflecting these past few months on the lessons of life our Catholic faith teaches – its mystery, its sanctity and its meaning. Now as we sing the Advent hope, we discover a supreme truth that we may overlook out of fear, or we may deny out of doubt, that is the divinity of life! Yes, you read correctly, the divine life given to us by grace. We seem too eager to overlook this wonder that faith discloses, that by God entering into our human condition we are the big winners.

This mystery has been the heart-beat of Christianity and the Catechism of the Catholic Church captures generations of witnesses to the boldness of this belief. It declares:

The Word became flesh to make us “partakers of the divine nature”: [2 Peter 1:4] “For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.”[St. Irenaeus]

“For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.”[St. Athanasius]

“The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods.”[St. Thomas Aquinas] (#460)

This is perhaps the greatest hope and joy given to all humankind that has echoed from the angel’s greeting to fearful shepherds: “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). There is so much more unfolding in the birth of this one child than we can fully comprehend. Think about it for a moment. We believe we have been created and made in the image of God, but in this mystery, God takes on our image, our humanity. The impact of this St. Peter alerts us to when he wrote: “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). God is just “one of us” and this means we have become so much more, but we must become. As my good friend, Father Gene Konkel, S.S. used to say, “Advent is a time of waiting, but who is waiting for whom? In fact, God is waiting for us to open our hearts to His coming this Christmas.”

I think that this Christmas, it is important to se-
riously glimpse the divine life we share and to work toward that in how we relate to one another. How might we truly relate to the reality of a person, not to the externals, the accidentals and the superficial. This means we must be able to see that divine life in them as well as in our own self. You know Jesus revealed to us the very nature of God as a unity of relations, the Blessed Trinity, and that is the key to divine life, the inner life of the Godhead. Relations, real human relations, what St. John Cardinal Newman called “heart to heart” relations. It is these relations that bring us true joy: a right relationship with God and one another.

It strikes me that we are all very busy in our society, in our jobs, our families and even in our Church. There is always something to do, somewhere to go, someone to contact. Such busyness can squeeze the joy out of our lives and deprive us of those quiet, peaceful moments when we can just sit back and enjoy the present moment. I don’t think anyone on their deathbed said they wished they spent more time at work! Work is important and fulfilling, but it is not everything. We need to take time to enjoy life, to enjoy our loved ones, to enjoy nature, to enjoy time with the Lord. I pray that this Advent affords us all time to be joyful, time to reflect and time to pray. The coming of Jesus Christ is the most joyful event in all of human history. I pray that we will experience the joy of Christmas fully as we spend these days of quiet preparation during Advent. Like Mary, we ponder deeply the coming of the Christ-child and we smile with great joy.

This Christmas and New Year, let us cherish the glad tidings of joy and hope, the divine life that God has bestowed on us in Christ and discover ways to better communicate with one another, to meet the stranger, the outcast, those at the fringes of life and wandering lost just outside our parish doors. I would also like to encourage us all to consider making a personal pilgrimage of healing in the coming months for the kind of healing our world needs and may the divine life draw us close to one another and to our God.

“Oh Come Divine Messiah/ The world in silence waits the day / When hope shall sing its triumph / And sadness flee away.”

Sincerely yours in the Risen Lord,

Most Rev.
John C. Wester,
Archbishop of Santa Fe