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ARCHBISHOP NICHOLS ON WHAT TO FIND IN THE CRIB

"This Scene Contains All the Elements of Our Created World"

LONDON, JAN. 1, 2010 ([Zenit.org](#)).- Here is the text of a pastoral letter by Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster for the feast of the Holy Family. The letter was released Dec. 26.

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On this Feast of the Holy Family, and during this Christmas season, we have in our minds the image of the crib. The scene of the birth of Christ is portrayed in so many different ways. Yet, in essence, it is always the same: a child, a mother and father, a stable, animals and some surrounding shepherds.

It is a picture of simplicity and poverty. Yet it is rich in meaning and bears much reflection, from many points of view.

Look at it this way. This scene contains all the elements of our created world. The hay and straw of the stable represent the fruit of the cultivated earth. The ox, ass and the sheep are the animal kingdom. At the centre is the person of Jesus. And, without ever romanticising poverty, there is a certain harmony between all these elements. Each one has its place. Each one has its space. And all serve the well-being of the weakest and most vulnerable person, the new-born child.

This simple reflection may have a special resonance at a time when we are intensely conscious of the fragility of our world and the threats to its stability.

Today we have to find a balanced and sustainable relationship between ourselves and the natural world, and between all people who share this planet. Unless we do so the chances of peace in our world are slim and the careless exploitation of our environment will continue. These right relationships have to begin in our homes, just as the readings we have heard suggest: respect between the generations, patience with each other, sensitivity to each others' wishes and needs.

Indeed the crib reminds us that we are really dependent on each other, on the created world and on God. Only when this dependence is acknowledged have we a hope of realigning ourselves and our way of living into something more appropriate to the needs of each other and of our environment.

Of course over Christmas we have been spending hard-earned income in order to express our love and thanks for each other. We must also have felt the pressures of advertising and expectation to spend more than we could afford. Yet, at the end of the day, in our family celebrations what counts is sincerity rather than extravagance, sensitivity rather than excess. When this is understood, then we can probably live far more simply without any loss of enjoyment. Then we can be more attentive to how much we consume, to what we throw away, to what we have to give to the poor.

The crib, then, is a lesson in right living, in the regard we have for each other, in our support for the poor and in our care for the created world.

Yet there is another element in the crib I almost overlooked. There are the angels. I nearly forgot them. Angels are just glimpsed, often at critical moments. They remind us of our hidden spiritual selves, for there is a life within each one of us which is open to God and only fully satisfied in the knowledge and love of God. In this world such knowledge and love is only ever partial, although the promise of its fulfilment lies ahead of us all. Yet even now God dwells with us, not least in the gift of forgiveness of which St Paul speaks in the Letter to the Colossians, as we have just heard: 'The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same.' (Col 3.13) Whenever we need to give or receive forgiveness this is the truth to remember: for us it is almost impossible; but for God working in us, it is not.

And this comes about all because of the Incarnation, the birth of the Eternal Word of God into the family of the stable of Bethlehem. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Because He shares in our human life, then we can share in his divine life. This is the miracle of our salvation.

Remember the lovely words of the poem about the crib:

'Welcome, all wonders in one sight
Eternity shut in a span,

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Summer in winter, day in night
Heaven in earth and God in man.
Great little one,
Whose all embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven,
Stoops heaven to earth.'

May God bless you and your families on this day and throughout this Christmas season.

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