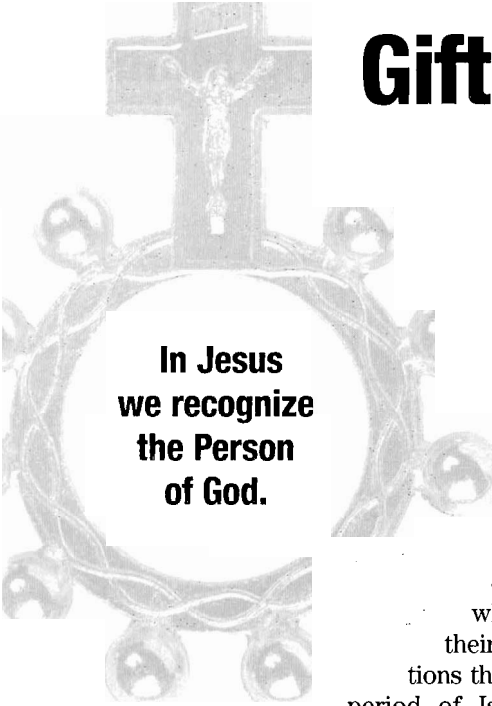


Gift to Humanity

"The glory of God is a living person and the life of each living person is the vision of God."

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c.202)



**In Jesus
we recognize
the Person
of God.**

Did You Know...

The provincial synod of the Episcopal Church of Rwanda voted unanimously to change its name to the Province of the Anglican Church of Rwanda.

Quote of the Week

Cardinal Walter Kasper of the Roman Catholic Church on ecumenical talks with Anglicans: "What we held to be our common heritage has begun to melt here and there like the glaciers in the Alps."

Human beings seem to have an innate desire and need not only to seek God's presence, but also to hear from God clearly. In all the cultures of the Near East, both biblical and extra-biblical sources reveal that in ancient times people relied primarily on charismatic authorities to hear what God desired from them and

their world and to know what directions they needed to go. Into the early period of Israel's history the Canaanite prophets were active and vocal when the wandering Hebrews entered the Promised Land. They would fall dramatically into ecstatic trances and utter oracles in unintelligible languages, yet these charismatic authorities commanded the attention of the people.

The major and minor prophets of the Old Testament displayed somewhat similar powers of insight and speech but these powers, and their voices, unlike that of the pagan prophets, echoed directly from an intimacy with God. This mystery was overwhelming for the people. Kings and peasants relied on these prophetic voices seeking knowledge and understanding in order to prepare them to live confidently day by day and to enable them better to enter the future with little anxiety.

John the Baptist, in his own strange charismatic demeanor, was likened to the great prophets such as Elijah and Isaiah, yet he was unlike the prophets before him. John realized that he had to decrease so that the Lord of salvation may increase. Christian faith declares that Jesus is God's Word and he who was born of Mary satisfies humanity's desire and need to seek God's presence and hear God's voice. As Irenaeus taught Christians and the world centuries ago, "The glory of God is a living person..." and for those of us who believe in the gift of the Incarnation, Jesus is the vision and voice of God that humanity longs for.

While I was attending a board of trustees meeting in November, I was struck one

evening while walking in New York City, Manhattan to be precise, to see so many fortune teller shops open, with people lined up on the sidewalk waiting in the cold to speak to the self-appointed oracle. On public display were Tarot cards, palm reading, tea leaves and the whole gamut of prescriptions used by these modern-day "prophets" who allegedly help people gain knowledge and foresight in facing and understanding life crises and the unknown future.

Christians anticipate the meaning of daily life and the future differently from those who consult psychics or horoscopes. We trust in a personal God and proclaim to the world that the essential truth we need to know and the ways in which we need to live have already been given to us in the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus. In Jesus we recognize the Person of God. We find wisdom and grace sufficient to meet every life crisis and to be assured of a future ultimately with God. In the human experience of Jesus, God became available to us as the very depth and breadth of human life itself.

The body of Christ then is the bearer of God's message of salvation intended for all people in every generation. In our complex age, which offers a variety of escapes from the realities of the human condition, "God become man" in Christ Jesus means that humanity is encouraged to continue to believe that the search for God ultimately begins with the acknowledgement and acceptance of the dignity of every human being and of all creation. In each living person and creature we are challenged and enabled to see a glimpse of the glorious vision of God.

Human beings long to hear from God, whether consciously or unconsciously. The Church's task is both to proclaim and to witness to the good news of God in Christ Jesus. Thanks be to God that this holy gift in Christ Jesus is a gift offered to all humanity. God has come. God in Christ is the glory of humanity.

Our guest columnist is the Rev. Michael Vono, rector of St. Paul's Within the Walls Church, Rome, Italy.