

God With Us

Homily at Nine Lessons and Carols St Edmundsbury Cathedral 23 December 2017

Where have you gone during this Service? In our lives there is so much that occupies our attention, thoughts that fill our heads, anxiety that crashes in taking us to yesterday or tomorrow, last week or next year...

Where have you gone during this Service? Perhaps you have gone in your mind to the place where you'll spend Christmas Day. Perhaps in your mind you have pre-empted the happy reunion with family members. Perhaps you are already looking forward to getting home after surviving the family gathering with minimal bruising. Perhaps you have gone back to your childhood - to times when you've sung carols in a choir. Or more challenging, with the chance to reflect, perhaps you have replayed some anger or resentment you feel and you can't accept.

For the Cathedral Choir and for our readers, after hours of rehearsal, this is it - the time to deliver. For us in the congregation this is another chance to rehearse, to practice the presence of God. This evening we experience God's presence through the beauty of the music, the energy of this spiritual place, the holiness of being together. We feel the thrill, the peace, the comfort, the joy. We might also feel the discomfort or the disturbance. Here, our minds are lifted beyond the concerns that occupy so much of our time and we remember that God is with us. Here we experience the transcendent, the divine. Here we are reminded that the heart of the Christmas story is "Emmanuel" – God with us.

Of course, for us this is it too – so not a rehearsal, in fact. Practising the presence of God.

Practising the presence of God can only happen now, in the present. We can learn to notice when our minds wander off in some day-dream or fantasy. Notice and return to the present – where God waits for us. This is sometimes called the sacrament of the present moment. The thrill, the peace, the comfort, the joy, the discomfort, the disturbance of this evening - all these help with our awareness of the divine in our lives.

God is with us all that time: when we go from here, over this Christmas weekend - be it happy or sad, however we choose to fill our time. God is with us.

All we have to do is be aware and notice.

*Canon Matthew Vernon
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