

A friend of mine recounts how when he returned from Bangladesh some years ago to a modest three bedroom home and a few thousand in the bank; he thought how rich he was. His experience highlights the contrast between those who have much and those who have little especially when we realize that we are among those who have much.

This insight begins to inform the magnitude of God's intervention in human history. For you and I to contemplate life without the security of the comforts we take for granted in this country is more than most of us care to think about.

I know how devastated my brother-in-law and sister-in-law were when their marriage photos were destroyed in a flood.

These examples remind us of how we construct an attachment to things that are peripheral to life. The divine being, the creator of all there is, put

everything to one side and entered human history as an infant.

Most of us are in awe of those who forsake all to follow a religious vocation, pledging poverty, chastity and obedience. Leaving behind home, family and possession. Or those who set off to follow their dream in a new environment with little apart from the clothes they wear and a handful of toiletries.

The contrast between our attachment to things and the divine being's coming into the world as the Christ child is so great I struggle to even begin to contemplate it. Perhaps that's why we need to be reminded so often. In the creed we say Sunday by Sunday, we affirm that "Jesus" was "one being with the Father" and that he "became truly human".

In the vastness of creation, where the earth; even our solar system is but a speck - God came. God chose not to come asserting power and authority

but to come as a human being, born to a particular person at a specific point in time.

I was taken by this thought as I contemplated Jesus entry into Jerusalem. Jesus again was entering. He was entering the symbolic heart of the religious establishment. Jerusalem was where the people of God worshipped their God. It was the where the temple was located.

It was where the religious leaders liked to remind all and sundry that they held privileged positions as the leaders of worship, custodians of the sacred texts and the distilled wisdom of the oral tradition of the people of God. Jerusalem was the symbol of God's presence. It was where sacrifices were made to God.

Jesus was not daunted by the projection of power that emanated from Jerusalem, the city of David, home of the sacred temple and the seat of power. He seemed to lack any fear as he prepared to enter Jerusalem.

His instructions to the disciples were clear and unequivocal, "Go into the village" Untie (the colt) and bring it here". There was no attempt to hide what was being done or to minimize the exposure someone riding a donkey into the holy city might attract.

Jesus entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, whilst being heralded as a king, was bound to come to the attention of both the secular and religious authorities. Pilate the Roman ruler would have been anxious lest it trigger an uprising. The religious authorities would have had reason to believe they were being mocked by this itinerate preacher riding a donkey.

As provocative as his actions were, Jesus seemed ready to face whatever resulted. When the Pharisees tried to have him quieten the crowd he replied, "if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Jesus seemed intent on proceeding regardless of the consequences. His entry into Jerusalem was a must do for Jesus. His work on earth would not have been complete without it.

And what a confrontation it was. A man riding a donkey surrounded by well-wishers hailing him as a king in absolute contrast with those who dressed in and exercised the trappings of secular and religious power.

Many are in awe of the fact that Jesus was prepared to sacrifice his earthly life for humankind. It shows how egocentric we are. We marvel that Jesus was prepared to forsake his humanity to complete his Messianic role.

In so doing we place ourselves at the centre of the universe. We think about the magnitude of Jesus' pain and how Jesus' death was the end result of human sin.

It is as if nothing else mattered. That the salvation of human beings in general and you and me in particular was of the utmost importance to God.

Now the message of the gospel is that you and I are important and that God counts even the hairs of our heads. But what is even more mind boggling is the fact that God gave up God's divinity to become human.

We humans are insignificant in God's creation. We are so small, the earth is so small; our solar system is so small.

You and I look at the stars and realize that there are out there other stars that dwarf earth. Stars we can't even see with the naked eye and only know they exist because we can detect their presence with highly sophisticated instruments.

Such a realization reinforces:

- our smallness,
- the magnitude of God's creation

- the gift God's presence in the person of Jesus is and
- the sacrifice his entry into human history as a child was.

Many of us hold back from confronting religious and secular leaders or embarking on a vocation where we perceive our way of life and the comforts we enjoy might be at risk. Many take the easy way out.

We avoid making waves, we keep our heads down; we don't rock the boat and leave the questioning to others. We follow the golden rule that says we should never volunteer, never put our hand up and give something a go; even when we know we are more than capable of fulfilling a particular role.

But that was not Jesus way. He knew that his work would not be completed until he had made this journey. It was not quite a Lady Godiva

journey but it was a journey in which Jesus divested himself of every symbol of power.

This was no sabre rattling exercise designed to intimidate others. It was rather the fulfilment of Jesus' vocation. He had entered the world as an expression of God's love for humanity and now he was entering what humans looked to as the seat of God's presence in the world. The place where humans encountered God.

The irony is that God in the person of Jesus was approaching the place people expected to encounter God. And yet when they encountered Jesus on a donkey they determined to kill him.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem raises a number of questions for us:

- ✓ Are we able to see beyond our own egocentrism and realise that we are but specks in God's creation and

- ✓ that as wonderful as human life is God's sacrifice of God's divinity in entering human history as a human being involved the relinquishment of far more than we are capable of contemplating.

As insignificant as we are; God came in the person of Jesus and wants to be our friend. God wants to release us from our self-obsession.

God's entry into Jerusalem in the person of Jesus, riding a donkey, states very plainly that God wants a new relationship with human beings. Not one built on power and intimidation but one built on humility and service.

We are challenged to open our hearts and minds to Jesus' entry into human history. To walk in his footsteps, to confront those we need to confront, to follow where we believe God is leading us, to make waves when they need to be made, to risk rocking the boat when it needs to be rocked and

to be prepared to ask the questions others might want asked.

Owen Strong

Locum Priest.