



## **El Santo Nino**

### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

On Christmas Eve, when I placed the statue of the infant Jesus in the manger of our Christmas crib, which was just behind me here in Saint Therese's chapel, I was struck as I so often am by the extraordinary and in a sense unbelievable nature of our Christian faith: that the mighty and all-powerful God, the creator and sustainer of everything that exists, should so love human beings that he sent his Son as one of us so that we might have our eyes and hearts opened to the truth about God and about ourselves as people made in God's image and likeness.

When I say that this truth is in a sense unbelievable what I really mean is that to many people, including even some Christians, it just seems too fantastic and in a way too good to be true. And why? Because it tells us of the extraordinary dignity and value of every human life, and of every moment in every human life, from life's very beginnings at the moment of our conception until the last moment of our lives, determined not by us but by God, when God calls us from this life to the eternal life for which we are created. At the heart of our celebration of Christmas, which concluded just one week ago, we find this extraordinary truth: that God came among us as one of us, and shared in every human reality from the inside if I can put it that way. He was conceived, he was carried in the womb of Mary his mother, he was born, he grew through infancy, through childhood, through what we today would call his teenage years, and into mature adulthood. He knew what it was to be hungry and to be well fed, to be cold and to be hot, to be lost and then found again by Joseph and Mary, to grow in wisdom as today's gospel passage puts it, to learn a trade and earn his living, to leave home and set out on his life's work, to be praised by some and condemned by others, to lose people he loved, to be betrayed by his closest friends and eventually to suffer and to die. In his own time and place he went through the same range of human experiences that we all do. He understands us, as I say, from the inside – and it is because he understands us, that he knows us through and through, that he loves us.

The one experience of course that Jesus did not have was an experience of personal sin. Jesus never turned away, not even for an instant, from his Father's will for him. He was never unfaithful to his commitment to do only what his Father sent him to do. He never betrayed or abandoned those who betrayed or abandoned him. He never used people for his own selfish purposes. He



never gave in to the temptations the devil placed in his way. In all of this of course he showed us what being created in the image and likeness of God is really all about.

That Jesus never committed sin does not make him a “super human” – it makes him truly and deeply human. When we sin, as we all do, and excuse ourselves by saying, “Well, I’m only human after all” we are not really speaking the truth. Sin does not make us human – it makes us less than fully human, because it makes us less than God has created us to be.

One of the things I love about Christmas, then, and which I also admire very much about your own devotion to el Santo Nino, is that these celebrations really invite us to focus very strongly on the humanity of Jesus. What is more human than the tiny, helpless, fragile baby lying in the manger, or the tiny, helpless, fragile baby that so many of you who are parents once held in your arms and some of you do today? What is more human than a twelve-year-old boy full of enthusiasm for life and eager to experience everything around him, even to the point where in his enthusiasm he perhaps doesn’t realise that what he is doing might make his parents anxious? This is what we remember in today’s gospel: it is mirrored in the experience of so many parents and their children.

In our Christian faith we rightly focus very much on the end of Jesus’s life – his Last Supper, his suffering, his death and his resurrection. But today’s feast of el Santo Nino reminds us not to forget that everything about the life of Jesus is significant, including his childhood about which we know very little historically but which, like all of us, must have been so important in terms of his growing understanding of himself and his relationship with God his Father.

The images of el Santo Nino which so many of you have brought with you today and which I will bless at the end of Mass will, I hope, have a special place in your homes. For all of you who are children or young people I hope that this image will remind you that you are deeply loved by God, that your life is a precious gift from God, and that God seeks to be at the heart of your life even today so that you can, with his grace, live your life to the full today and into the future. For those of you who are parents, I hope that this image will remind you of the extraordinary gift and extraordinary privilege and responsibility which being a parent really is, no matter how young or old your children might be, and no matter how much they might at times have disappointed you in the past or even now and into the future. And I hope and pray that this image might remind all of us that God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son, not to condemn the world but so that the world might be saved through him.

May the Holy Child Jesus bless and protect us all, keep us faithful to him, and lead us to the fullness of life with him in heaven. And may the prayers of his mother Mary, the Help of Christians, accompany us and support us along the way.