

Surrendering Control

Many people travel this time of the year. In the northern climes in which I live, that will often mean travel disruption. Winter weather will quite often give us flight cancellations or delays and impassable roads. The deepest frustration arises from the fact that we are unable to do anything about it. We are out of control. All we can do is adjust, but the adjustment we make is temporary. We change plans as necessary to deal with the situation, all the while having the intention of re-claiming control and getting back to our normal, or to what we had originally planned.

The Christmas liturgies of the Church call us to a complete surrender of control, to an adjustment which is both radical and permanent. The summons is to change our plans – our life plans! – in the light of God's will for us. This means accepting, in peace, the truth about just who is in control: Almighty God.

Much attention is focused in the Christmas season upon Mary, the mother of Jesus. In her we see the perfect example of complete surrender to this truth of God's sovereignty. To say that any plans she might have had in mind were disrupted by the plan of God would be an understatement. Yet her response to Gabriel's message was an immediate and faith-filled acquiescence to the will of God. Mary knew that the only one truly "in control" is God, who guides the course of world events in accordance with his plan, and who calls us to adjust our hopes and desires in light of his saving purpose.

As we listened on Sunday's Solemnity of the Epiphany to the familiar narrative of the visit of wise men from the East, we heard about individuals whose response to the plan of God was the direct opposite of Mary's. Herod responded with both fear and fury; the chief priests and scribes with astonishing indifference. There was clearly no intention on their part to change their lives.

These divergent responses direct our attention to the exercise of human freedom. In the Christian worldview, all of history unfolds according to God's plan, and is filled with purpose, namely the salvation of the human race. God is in control; not us. He has the plan and he brings it to fulfilment. At the same time, Mary's surrender to this truth teaches us that the achievement of God's plan somehow mysteriously hinges upon human freedom. Christ has come to set us free from the slavery imposed by sin so that we could freely respond to God, freely surrender control of our lives to his love. How shall we respond?

The answer that we give to this question is of crucial importance not only for the state of our individual lives but also for that of the world. In spite of the best efforts of world leaders, wars continue to rage between nations, violent protests erupt in our streets, migrants and refugees numbering in the

millions are on the move seeking safety and a better life. In answer to the pain and suffering we inflict upon one another, Christianity proclaims with clarity and insistence that it is only when we are in right relationship with God that we shall find the way to peaceful relations with our fellow human beings. Only when the soul is rightly ordered to God will our relationships with one another be ordered in peace. The healing of the relationship with God begins by acknowledging that he is in control, that he is truly sovereign, and then by surrendering to his sovereignty, to his plan for humanity, a surrender that takes place by faith, repentance and obedience.

This surrender will lead to radical change in the way we live. We are told that the wise men, after offering homage to the Christ child, went home by "another road". So, too, with us. When we bow down to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, when we surrender control to him, our lives will change direction. This is not something to reject in fear but to embrace with joy, because we shall find ourselves on the road that leads not only to peace on earth but also to eternal life.