

Knowledge of the Mystery of God

a sermon preached at

Watchnight Mass

Wednesday 31 December 2008

at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

by Fr David Moore

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Lecture: Exodus 34:1-10; Colossians 2:1-7; Matthew 6:31-34

Time is an arbitrary concept. In order to belong, and because some things can be usefully measured thus, I accept the convenience of the arbitrary unit which is called 1 year. From one procession of the earth around the sun to another I measure my progress. I may thank God for a 'good year', or I may thank God that year is over! Yet I do not know what is truly 'good', nor do I have any idea what the next procession of the earth around the sun may bring! It has to be admitted that we are deeply wedded to this processional unit of measurement. A great deal of profit is made by titillating our attention around this arbitrary 31st of December. We accept the customary, ritualised greeting, but if we are honest we will admit that we do not actually know what true happiness is. In any case, the call is to neither goodness nor to happiness. The true call, rather, is to wholeness, completeness. By such a standard the earth's procession around the sun matters little, useful though it may be for taxation and superannuation purposes.

Completion *τελειος*, as St Paul declared, means coming to the knowledge *επιγνωσιν* of the mystery *μυστηριον* of God. This, of course, is a paradox. If God is a mystery, then what possible knowledge can a mortal have of God? The apparently-obvious answer is 'None!' God is an inscrutable mystery, hidden in cloud atop Sinai's mount from all but Moses, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit incomprehensible, as St Athanasius supposedly declared. Yet if man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God, and if there is a covenant between God and humankind, and if the Word became flesh, and if Christ declares that we are one with him who is one with the Father, and if the Kingdom of God is inside us, then the consequence is that we are indeed made to come to the knowledge of the mystery of God! That is the completion, the wholeness, the fullness *πληρωμα* of God for which we long and for which we were made. Such fullness, such completion defies chronology, and certainly the unit of time we call 1 year and all the other arbitrary measurements we make from it.

Day-to-day we may not feel that we have access to the knowledge of the mystery of God, preoccupied as we are with the watch, the calendar, and all the machinery upon which that depends. For it is by these arbitrary mechanisms that we measure our accomplishments, successes and failures, our usefulness to the church or the company or the nation. In fact, the truth about my successes and failures is that those things which I regarded as failure while I was up to my neck in them frequently (always?) turned out to be true successes! And those things which seemed to me to be successes while I was basking in them frequently (always?) turned out to be failures!

We are indeed those who worry about what we will wear and what we will eat and drink, caught up in a desperate but all-too-often futile search for 'happiness' and 'success'. Thus preoccupied, we are strangers to our true ground – which is nothing other than the knowledge of the Christ within, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. In fact, whatever I may count as success (or failure), it has little to do with this calendar year 2008. For true success is the knowledge of the mystery of God, which obviously transfigures and transcends chronology. This knowledge is perfect freedom. No longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me! This knowledge of the Christ who resides, abides, who makes a dwelling place in us – and in all humankind! – is the true 'success', the hidden treasure. It is the hidden treasure in the Divine ground, the

understanding of the mystery of our divinity in Christ who shares our humanity.

On this night we are particularly aware of life's value being shackled by the measure of the earth's procession around the sun. Liberation from this enslavement, which is good news, is the way being opened to the knowledge of the mystery of God, which is the mystery of our true humanity. The customary greeting 'Happy New Year' may have some relevance in terms of taxation and superannuation and the company balance sheet, and may be an effective social lubricant, but it effectively conceals the mystery of God, that is, Christ himself, in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Perhaps we might consider an alternative (albeit bigger mouthful, and rather less catchy) greeting on this night: 'May you come to the knowledge of the mystery of God'!

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