



THE INCARNATION SOLIDARITY IN SUFFERING

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The intimacy that exists between soul and body is a marvel of creation and a mystery of human existence.... It is in the body that we see and take delight in the beauties of God's created universe, and in the body that we ourselves bear the marks of Christ's Passion.... Theologians have written much about the Incarnation as the central act of our redemption, the high point in the drama of salvation history. Spiritual writers can write endlessly about it [and] about mankind being elevated and made once again whole and holy, about expiation and atonement and reconciliation of the fallen world with the divine will, about the new Adam and the kingdom of God and the life of the world to come. What we tend to forget, though, is the very folksy truth that God by his Incarnation took on a human body. We don't often stop to reflect on the most basic meaning of this doctrine: that God, too, knows exactly how it feels to be cold, or tired, or hungry, or sore with pain, because he too has had a body. He has spent long hours, for years at a time, doing the routine and unspectacular work of a carpenter, has walked long days over dusty roads with tired feet, has curled his shoulders against the night air or a chill rain, has been without sleep while others slept, has been thirsty and hot and weary and ready to drop from exhaustion....

From the dark of the womb to the black of the tomb, through childhood to manhood and the last, slow, long-drawn-out agony of dying, he has known for himself what it means to live in a handful of clay...to taste the salt of sweat and tears, to hear music and birdsong and the vilest of insults, to stumble and fall, be bruised and mangled and torn. He cried out at last, as have all of us at one time or another.... By redeeming us, he did not thereby free us from our suffering or our pains or our sorrows. Just as his Resurrection is our victory and our triumph over death but does not mean we do not have to die, so his Passion has redeemed our suffering but does not mean we do not have to suffer or feel pain. Yet his example has taught us how to look upon our suffering in a new way and so to look upon our body in a new light....

Father, said Christ at the moment of his supreme agony in the garden, *not my will but thine be done.* Yet God will not, has not, asked us to bear any more than he himself has borne in his Incarnation and suffering and death.