

## HOMILY AND PASTORAL PRAYER

I would like to share with you a monologue written by Frederick Buechner from the perspective of the Innkeeper from the Christmas story. From Luke 2:7: "And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

"That was a long, long time ago and a long, long way away. But the memories of men are also long, and nobody has forgotten anything about my own sad, queer part in it all unless maybe they have forgotten the truth about it. But you can never blame people for forgetting the truth because it is, after all, such a subtle and evasive commodity. In fact, all that distinguishes a truth from a lie may finally be no more than just the flutter of an eyelid or the tone of a voice.

If I were to say, 'I BELIEVE!' that would be a lie, but if I were to say, 'I believe ...,' that might be the truth. So I do not blame posterity for forgetting the subtleties and making me out to be the black villain of the piece - the heartless one who said, 'No room! No room!' I'll even grant you that a kind of villainy may be part of the truth. But if you want to speak the whole truth, then you will have to call me a villain with a catch in your voice, at least a tremor, a hesitation maybe, with even the glitter of almost a tear in your eye. Because nothing is entirely black, you know. Not even the human heart.

"I speak to you as men of the world, not as idealists, but as realists. Do you know what it is like to run an inn - to run a business, a family, to run anything in this world for that matter, even your own life? It is like being lost in a forest of a million trees, and each tree is a thing to be done. Is there fresh linen on all the beds? Did the children put on their coats before they went out? Has the letter been written, the book read? Is there money enough left in the bank? Today we have food in our bellies and clothes on our backs, but what can we do to make sure that we will have them still tomorrow? A million trees. A million things.

"Until finally we have eyes for nothing else, and whatever we see turns into a thing. The sparrow lying in the dust at your feet - just a thing to be kicked out of the way, not the mystery of death. The calling of children outside your window - just a distraction, an irrelevance, not life, not the wildest miracle of them all. That whispering in the air that comes sudden and soft from nowhere - only the wind, the wind ...

"Of course I remember very well the evening they arrived. I was working on my accounts and looked up just in time to see the woman coming through the door. She walked in that slow, heavy-footed way that women have in the last months, as though they are walking in a dream or at the bottom of the sea. Her husband stood a little behind her - a tongue-tied, helpless kind of man, I thought. I cannot remember either of them saying anything, although I suppose some words must have passed. But at least it was mostly silence. The clumsy silence of the poor. You know what I mean. It was clear enough what they wanted.

"The stars had come out. I remember the stars perfectly though I don't know why I should, sitting inside as I was. And my wife's cat jumped up onto the table where I was sitting. I had not stood up, of course. There was mainly just silence. Then it happened much in the way that you have heard. I did not lie about there being no room left - there really was none - though perhaps if there had been a

room, I might have lied. As much for their sakes as for the sake of the inn. Their kind would have felt more at home in a stable, that's all, and I do not mean that unkindly either. God knows.

"Later that night, when the baby came, I was not there, I was lost in the forest somewhere, the unenchanted forest of a million trees. Fifteen steps to the cellar, and watch out for your head going down. Firewood to the left. If the fire goes out, the heart freezes. Only the wind, the wind. I speak to you as men of the world. So when the baby came, I was not around, and I saw none of it. As for what I heard - just at that moment itself of birth when nobody turns into somebody - I do not rightly know what I heard.

"But this I do know. My own true love. All your life long, you wait for your own true love to come - we all of us do - our destiny, our joy, our heart's desire.  
So how am I to say it, gentlemen? When he came, I missed him.

"Pray for me, brothers and sisters. Pray for the Innkeeper.  
Pray for me, and for us all, my own true love."

Dear Hyattstown church, this is the greatest challenge people of faith have while living in the world and desiring a life of faith . . . the challenge of missing the wind - the voice of God - the birth of hope and truth while being surrounded by the trees of concerns.

So now we have the world's clamor behind us, and we can live the life of faith that God calls us to. We can live each of the remaining days of Christmas, in the tender anticipation of a baby, who was wise, who was loved, who shared generously that love that he knew. We can live as many moments as we can seeking our true love - the truest love of all - that of our Creator, our Brother, our Savior . . . seeking the Christ who was born within the reach of all.

I say Merry Christmas to you today, and every day, until these Holy days are over . . . and may we treasure them every day of the year, never giving up hope for peace on Earth, Goodwill to all!

LET US PRAY:

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

God of mystery and love, help us move from the sweet experience of the birth of the Christ Child into the reality of the powerful witness of Jesus who will be Messiah for us all. Remind us again that this season is not about bows and boxes, feasts and family; it is about preparing us, your people, for a mission and ministry of hope and peace for this aching and angry world. Empower us to be people of great faith, placing our trust in you, believing that peace is not only possible, it truly can happen if we will work with you and with one another. As we have spoken in our hearts and with our voices, our concerns for those near and dear to us, remind us that you hear these prayers and you respond with love to each one. Let us be in prayer with one another, for one another, for our church and our community, for our nation and our world, for all earth's people and creatures, that we may be those who promote peace. Give us courage and strength. Help us reach across areas that divide, offering compassionate assistance wherever it is needed.