

HOORAY!

John 1:1-5

Words, words, words, everywhere! We are surrounded by words: on TV, in books, on the street, at home, etc. We are surrounded by constant chatter. Even when there is a moment of silence, our minds are full of words. John O'Donohue, a famous Irish writer and teacher, says it well when he calls it: "Mental Static." Even when we try to pray and be in the presence of God we are filled with worries, thoughts and words. Just to give you an example, let's take a silent moment for prayer and observe what happens. This is not to judge, but just to notice. (silence) So what happened? What lists came to your mind? What worries surfaced? What words? Today's scriptures tell us about a different kind of word: The Word that was before all words; the Word that was from the beginning of creation; the Word indeed that brought all things into being; the Word that is the wisdom of God. This is the Word that is supposed to fill our ears, hearts and minds. It is the Word of God that created and continues to create our world. As Christians we know it as the Word of God incarnate: Jesus Christ, the ground of all being.

Because of all the baggage that we carry about words, I have often wanted the reading from John to be a bit different, clearer if you will. I have thought many times that if it reads this way, we would all get it: "In the beginning was love, the heart of God. And love was with God, and love was God." But since I can't rewrite the scripture to my own liking, especially on Christmas Eve, I have had to go behind the words to get a deeper understanding. I have had to think about words. How are they formed? With every word that is spoken, there is breath. We have to breathe in order to speak. Breath is the essence of our life. If we can't breathe we cannot live. When a baby is born, the first thing that needs to happen in order for us to know that the baby is alive is taking a breath.

In the second chapter of Genesis when we get more details about how God created human beings, we are told that God breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of Adam. So when we hear about the Word, we not only know that it is about God's knowledge, wisdom, creativity and power, it is also about God's very own self, life and breath. The Word as it is mentioned in the Gospel of John refers to the very mystery of God disclosed in Christ. Jesus comes and teaches with words which we repeat till this day, but he himself is also the very Word of God, the very breath of God with us. This is the mystery of Christmas. This is the good news of Christmas for us. The Word of God is not some distant word in a book or a story of something that happened a long time ago, it is right here, as close to us as our own breath. This is the kind of intimacy God brings to us through the Word.

So here is a story about the Word:

The children of Classes 1 and 2 were assembled in the hall, waiting for the class to begin. The visiting poet was with them this morning, and they were all full of excitement. They always enjoyed her visits. But Class 3 was late. The children were getting impatient. The poet looked around at their eager faces. An unnatural quiet descended, as they seemed almost to be holding their breath in anticipation. "You are so quiet today" She smiled at them. "Let's see if you can make a noise! Let's all shout "Hooray!" So a shout went up: "Hooray!" "That's splendid," she beamed. "Now, when Class 3 arrives, let' play a game with them. Let's all be as quiet as mice. And when they are all in their places, we'll all shout a huge "Hooray!" to greet them. We'll see if we can raise the roof! Agreed?" The children were thrilled at the idea. They became quiet again, and you could have heard a pin drop. Class 3 came into the hall. They were sorry they were late. They sat down quietly. And then on a signal from the poet, they shouted "Hooray!" The great Hooray resounded through the hall, through the school, through the whole village. And- oh! Imagine! The roof flew off! Off it flew, leaving the blue sky open above the children's heads. Off it flew over the gardens and houses, the streets and the trees. And as it went, it dropped "hoorays" off all over the town, Moms & dads doing the laundry suddenly found a "hooray" in the kitchen. Dogs fast asleep in their corners were awoken by the happy sounds trickling down from the sky, as the roof flew past. Through keyholes, windows and open doors the hoorays crept into every home. Whispers and echoes of joy covered the whole community in morning mystery. Hearts fluttered and lifted the happy sound. And the roof flew on and on, carrying the echoes of joy through the world, and bringing the rafters of homes throughout the land into resonance. Later, in the night, the rain came, and every raindrop picked up the sound of the great hooray. The next morning, the mist that covered the hills and valleys was impregnated with the same cry of joy. It trickled away into the streams and rivers. It crept up the stalk of every flower and nestled in the feathers of every bird. Hooray, hooray, hooray! As the

weeks passed by, the gentle waves lapped against a distant seashore. And the close-curved shells - if you listened closely, echoed that first hooray. Years later, the poet smiled, as the echoes of the first hooray gently touched her face again in a passing breeze. She knew another poet. The poet whose first joyous hooray had soaked into everything that is. She knew that her own poems were a tiny echo of that great poem of creation, and she laughed out loud at the mystery of it all. And her laughter bubbled off and away, to gurgle forever through the universe.

May you hear God's great hooray in your hearts as you receive the gift of the birth of Christ, the breath of God, the Word Incarnate. Amen.