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Birthdays

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Birthdays

Birthdays have a variety of meanings and attached feelings that arise from reasons other than the number of years being commemorated. We can think of birthdays as occasions where the most important feature is to celebrate that a person we care about is here among us. Our concern is for the people themselves, not primarily the amount of time that they have been in this world. The number of years since someone was born is a numerical notation that identifies one aspect of a person's life, but definitely not the most important.

We want to learn the birthdays of people we know not so we can compare their number of years with ours, as if that could represent the main bond between us, but to learn something personal about them that will help us relate as a fellow human. Knowing even the date of birth of someone provides us with a possible point of interaction, as when we compare one another's place within the yearly calendar of seasons and events. Each birthday can be related to other dates that are familiar to us, such as 9/11, July 4 or any date of common interest, thereby affording opportunities for imaginative and creative conversations.

The birthday of Jesus is also an occasion for conversations and celebrations, but especially for deepening the bonds of friendship with God. Like us, he was born. Though Jesus does not have a birth certificate for a particular year, month, and day, we are glad that he was born whenever he was. If we wonder at times whether or not we really have a relationship with Jesus, we might reflect on our habitual positive response to his birth. We can see little children wanting to pick up the baby in a crèche display, as they readily identify with a little one. Only later will they, as we, wonder at how God who creates all that exists manages to enter our world the same way as we all do, by being born. The more we come to appreciate the mystery of this God-human connection, the more we can resonate with the person whose birthday we celebrate.

Only people have birthdays, but here is the eternal God, as human, with a day of birth. We might ask, as did Mary when she was invited to be the mother through whom this birth would take place, "How can this be?" Even if we do not understand how this can be, we might recognize how greatly we are affirmed in our humanity by the historical event of God, in Christ, having a birthday.

The birthday of Jesus is an occasion for celebration: sometimes in ritual gatherings, as at a Christ-Mass (from which we receive the word Christmas), or at parties of various kinds where Jesus, even if his name is perhaps rarely

mentioned, is the bond and the cause for our gathering. If we live as those who are glad at Jesus being born, then we are in a friendship with God that does not end even with our death. We are due, in this unique friendship, to have another kind of birthday: into the life of the "Son of Man" who was born, died, and is risen.

Birthdays: without ours, we wouldn't be. Without Jesus', where would we be?