



Shaken by Christmas

“Perhaps what we modern people need most is to be genuinely shaken,” wrote Father Alfred Delp when Adolph Hitler ruled Nazi Germany. “Perhaps that is . . . why God has sent us into this time, . . . why he holds us in such a state of chaos . . . and why there is no end in sight. . . . He does it to teach us one thing again: how to be moved in spirit . . . [and gain] a clear view of things as they really are.”

In the heart of Advent 2014 we too find ourselves in a world “shaken” by events: the bloody expansion of ISIS, the blatant aggression of Russia, the incalculable threat of Ebola. None of these assailants is a respecter of borders. What if they were to cross over ours?

A timely question in this season when the Prophets call us to make ready for the greatest border crossing of all. At Christmas the Eternal Son of the Father crosses the ancient border of human hostility to God in order to break down the borders of suspicion and hatred that keep us humans apart. For the Son of Mary is born to be brother to all and neighbor to all. He has come to re-draw the boundaries of human acceptance. To those who accept *him*, the Gospel proclaims on Christmas day, he gives “power to become children of God” – that is, power to extend to others the acceptance we first receive from him.

“What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race . . .” It still is. Two thousand years later the “darkness has not overcome it” – neither the darkness of World War I a century ago, nor the even wider and deeper darkness that engulfed Father Delp in World War II. We continue to celebrate Christmas because “the light shines in the darkness” still. The Son of Mary, born to cross over the border of death, has come back with the bright victory of life in his hands for the sharing. “From his fullness we have all received” what Father Delp sought: “a clear view of things as they are.”

For us as for Father Delp, “there is no end in sight” to the gathering chaos of this time into which “God has sent us.” But He has sent his Son into our time as well, the Son “who is the *beginning*,” St. Paul says. Christmas reminds us that we need not see through to the end of our darkness. We need only walk toward it with faith in him who never ceases to invite us to begin our journey to God anew, and who promises to be with us every step of the way.