

## OUTSTRETCHED ARMS



Two of the most common ways Christ is pictured are as a child in the arms of His mother Mary, and as a man, crucified, dying on a cross. Examples of these two images can be found in almost every Church, and St. Bridget's is no exception. So common, so expected, are these



pictures, that we fail to see how very extraordinary they are. For they depict the God we worship as entirely powerless; the all powerful as entirely dependent on, entirely at the mercy of, those He created. The sense of wonder in this is well caught in the *Song of Christ's Glory* in the second chapter of Philipians:

*Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness,  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.*

How often do we pride ourselves in our own strength and self reliance? We like to see ourselves as able to achieve things by our own efforts and to shoulder our own burdens; we do not want to be a trouble to others and we do not wish to be obligated to others. But this is not God's way: born as a child He placed himself in the care of Mary, and at the end of his earthly life He gave Himself into the power of his enemies.

Placing oneself in a position of such dependency is a risk: it calls upon people to respond to the need. Sometimes the response will be positive, as when Mary willingly accepted the responsibility of becoming the Mother of God's Son; sometimes the response will be negative as when Christ was rejected and denied in His passion. Nor is it the strong that

are called on to respond: God chose to place Himself in the arms of Mary, a young and inexperienced girl without obvious advantages of talent or wealth. Her first reaction is to be troubled, and to wonder how she can be fit to meet the demands made upon her. But none the less she answers God's call, recognising that when the will to serve is there, nothing is impossible with God.

Nor is the call to respond a thing of history. Our world today is full of powerlessness and need. There are the hungry in need of something to eat; there are the thirsty in need of clean water to drink; there are the strangers who need to be invited in. There are those who need clothing, those who are sick and need looking after and there are many prisoners – literal and metaphorical – who need visiting. And Christ has told us that whatever we do for the least of these brothers of His, we do for Him. As the parable in Matthew makes clear, some will respond and will enter the kingdom prepared for them, and others will not and will depart from the presence of Christ.

For the Kingdom of Heaven is in the midst of us, and so we must be open and engaged with others, not shut up in our own self sufficiency. We must not be afraid to be needy ourselves, and to place ourselves in the hands of others; and we must be ready to respond to the needs of others as they cry out to us.



I finish with two more pictures of Christ. The first is another picture of helplessness.

Once more Christ is cradled in the arms of Mary, but here it is the dead Christ just



taken from the Cross. The final image is that of the risen Christ, expressing the ultimate victory, and reminding us that Christ is always with us today: beside us in our times of need, and with us too when we stretch out our arms to help His brothers and sisters in their times of trouble.