

120907 2nd SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Peace be with you. As Father Bill told you, my name is Deacon Tom. Most of you don't know me yet. My wife and I just moved here a little over a month ago – and on Friday, I received the letter from Bishop Kicanas that assigns me here to St. Philip's Church. Not to spend too much time about myself – I want to say a few words about my voice. If my speaking sounds strange or odd to you – I've had three operations on one of my vocal cords. In the last operation – the doctor inserted plastic to help me speak in a louder voice. The plastic they used is Gortex – do you all know what Gortex is? At the parish we just left in Colorado – I asked the parishioners why they thought that the doctor used Gortex in my throat – one young woman said it was to keep the hot air inside of me. I told her to be careful because I have friends in high places.

At any rate – working under the direction of Fr. Bill, I look forward to getting to know you, and to ministering to you and yours. And just so you know – chocolate cake or chocolate pie are powerful incentives for me to get to know you and work with you here in the parish.

Okay – let's (really) get to work. Our first reading today was from the beautiful 11th Chapter of Isaiah.

This Scripture passage is most often recognized as the source of the teachings of the Church regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Catechism says that these gifts are permanent dispositions that make us docile to following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Can anyone name any of the traditional seven gifts? They include: WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING, KNOWLEDGE, COUNSEL, PIETY, FORTITUDE and FEAR (or holy awe) of the LORD.

Now I don't know about you – but I know that I need to pray so much more for the Gifts of the Spirit – because I sort of flunk the first part of the definition – I don't think I have hardly any PERMANENT disposition that makes me docile. But the one gift that I come closest to having a permanent disposition to is the one of PIETY. I don't mean like 'fold my hands' look-at-me I'm holy sort of piety. But God the Spirit has restored in me the gift of love of holiness and holy experiences. I love the Mass... I love it when we have adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. I love it when I am around people or situations that lift my mind and heart to holiness. Let me give you just one example of many.

Last year, my wife and I went to Mass at the Cathedral in Denver.

Afterwards, we participated in a two-hour Advent Praise & Worship vigil led by Archbishop Chaput. This was held at Christ The King Chapel -- a beautiful facility located on the campus of the Archdiocese. By 7pm there must have been 500 people jammed into the small chapel... they were standing in the aisles and the back was filled to overflowing as well.

Do you know who the people were that were in attendance? By my estimate -- 75% of the participants were young people... people in their 20's and 30's... lots of singles -- many young families with kids. They came to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus was exposed for a full two hours.... And during those two hours -- people prayed... they sang traditional hymns and newer praise and worship songs. Dozens -- perhaps hundreds of people went to Confession... the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Friends, this was a Saturday in December when young folks go to bars and movies and holiday parties.

But here they were -- on their knees ... or standing ... some with hands lifted in signs of worship. Everyone was singing songs and hymns to music played by seminarians... It was a powerful -- tender -- holy evening.

One of the hymns was: How Great is Our God. And a verse in that song goes: "Age to age he stands.... And time is in his hands... Beginning and the End... beginning and the end. The Godhead, Three in one, Father, Spirit, Son... the Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb...How Great is our God..." To hear 500 people singing those words with emotion and with a spirit that says, "I want to be here with you Jesus." My heart filled with a holy joy that Advent evening -- and it returns to me even now as I pray to welcome a new birth of Christ in my heart. And so that you know this – my wife and I have been in prayer for a new coming of Christ in this parish family as well.

By the way – those words in that song about the Lion and the Lamb – they are taken right from our reading from Isaiah today. Now... you and I are into our Advent vigil. The word vigil has some derivations in meaning – vigorous... attentive... awake.... alive... People who are preparing for Christ's coming in their lives are attentive... awake... They are alive and prepared to rejoice. In fact, next Sunday, we will 'splash' our liturgy with joy. God willing, next Sunday Father Bill will wear rose-colored vestments.... And we will light the rose candle in our Advent wreath. These are small signs of joy for the expected birth of the Baby Jesus.

Jesus who, this time wants to be reborn into you and me – into our lives and hearts and our liturgical celebrations.

So I would ask you – as you sit here now – or as you hopefully take these thoughts with you from this morning's readings and homily – are you attentive to the Word of God? Are you prayerful to receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Are you listening for God's voice in your heart? Do you have a plan for your Advent journey?

John the Baptist told those awaiting the Messiah to repent as the way to prepare for his coming. If the Lord is coming to you – will you be ready to receive him this Christmas? One important step for me – and I strongly urge you to consider it – is to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our Advent Penance Service will be held this coming Thursday from 4:00 till 5:30pm. Prepare the manger of your heart with a thorough cleaning and freshening up. Prepare to discover or rediscover the difference between short-term Holiday happiness and long-term Christmas joy. Wouldn't that be a gift of the newborn one!

And I will pray that one or more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit will accompany this for you. Advent Blessings.