

122108 4th Sunday in Advent – Jesus is Coming

It would be my prayer that you have a priest or a deacon or a nun – someone who has helped you on your journey. I have some priests that have been a part of my journey – I'd like to tell you about three of them. One is a professor at the University of Dayton. He just sent me some holiday tips... one of his tips says this: Avoid carrot sticks. Anyone who puts carrots on a holiday buffet table knows nothing of the true Christmas spirit. In fact, if you see carrots, leave that party immediately. Go next door, where they're serving rum balls or mincemeat pie or such. This tip from a professor – but a holy, wonderful priest. I've spent hours in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament along with this priest.

Another priest that I know is Fr. Larry Richards. He's from Bread of Life Parish in Erie Pennsylvania. What can I tell you about him? Well – in a recent Advent homily – he asked parishioners if they remember the old bumper sticker that had these words... “Jesus is coming.... Look busy.” People laughed when he said this. Fr. Larry continued, “Well guess what he said – Jesus is coming... He is coming on December 25th – and you need to be busy right now getting ready for his coming.”

So I ask you ... what have you done with this Advent? Are these weeks you've experienced the same as the weeks before Advent began? Did you add any prayer or penance or almsgiving or adoration or service to the community during your Advent? Jesus is coming – like the bumper sticker says... You would do well to get busy.”

I happen to care a great deal for Fr. Larry – he is a no-spin-zone sort of priest. No varnish. Listen to these words contained in parish welcome brochures, on the Bread of Life website and on their bulletin: “We believe that EVERYONE belongs in our Father's house - the Church. We are all hungry for the Word of God and God's love. We all yearn for meaning and direction in our lives. Jesus welcomes EVERYONE -- SAINTS & SINNERS. And EVERYONE comes, regardless of color, nationality, or sexual orientation; whether rich, poor, sick, in health; whether single, divorced, happily married, not so happily married; traditional families and single parents, the widowed, priests, nuns, deacons, the physically and mentally challenged, those suffering from mental illness -- Jesus Christ accepts all of us where we are, *but He loves us too much to leave us where we are!*” So please believe that there is a place for you here at St. Joseph Church - Bread of Life Community! But be prepared to leave status quo behind. Being a parishioner there will change you – and that’s what Advent is supposed to do – to change you... to help you to change yourself. Allowing God’s grace to help you be open and ready for a new coming of Christ in your heart... your mind... your life.

I can just imagine someone here today saying to himself, “Yeh, sure, but I don’t want to get too caught up in this stuff. I mean I don’t want to act that Catholic. People may talk. And further – I’m not sure I’ve got that kind of religious energy or stamina in me... I just think I do better laying low – not trying to get holy or act any different than I’ve ever been. I just want to have a nice Christmas – nothing too holy... and besides, I can’t change – I’ve been me – the way I am for years and years...”

To those who feel like that, I want to tell you about another priest from my journey. His name is Fr. Patrick O'Doherty from Ocala, Florida. He took over a parish when they didn't even have a church building. They were doing Masses for about 300 people in the assembly hall of a local school. Today – they have a magnificent church with about 5,000 families registered and attending.

And at a time in my own life when I just wanted to lay low... when I wasn't too interested in being spiritual... when I wasn't a deacon... when I was a cultural Catholic – that's a person who calls himself Catholic but doesn't really practice the fullness of the faith... when I was just a cultural, do it my way sort of person... one day as we were driving by Fr. Pat's Church, my loving, gentle wife asked me if I'd consider going there to try this Church. Her words may have been God's yeast of Grace starting to work in me – who knows?

We tried that Queen of Peace Parish in Ocala, I began to listen to and then to get to know Fr. PJ as he is affectionately known. He was a powerful speaker. Although quite opinionated on major issues such as pro-life – he always speaks from a deep love of God and based upon the gospel. One of the early homilies – Father got up and introduced himself this way, “My name is Fr. Pat and I'm a recovering sinner.” I knew immediately what was wrong with me. I didn't think I was a sinner – yet things weren't right in my heart... and I knew I wasn't recovering.” But I did realize something was wrong with my ‘don't rock the boat’ sort of Christianity.

Long story short, we became devoted parishioners and later friends with Fr. PJ. He is part of the reason that I began the journey to become a deacon. But I can assure you, before I met him, I had no idea – no thought that I could or would ever do anything like this in the Catholic Church. Nothing except come to church once in awhile when I felt like it... and I would live my life the way I thought it should be lived. Certainly not the way some priest thought it should be.

But you see – if you remember the Gospel for today – what was it that happened? Mary was going to have a profound change take place in her life... Just as I have had a profound change take place in my life. As Paul Harvey says, “Here’s the rest of the story.”

Some years after meeting Fr. Pat, he sent a Christmas card – with a lovely hand-written message in it. Here is what Fr. Pat said: “You have been chosen before the world began, to be holy – to be blameless in His sight. And in case you, like Mary are saying, ‘How is this possible, how can it be?’ The Holy Spirit will come upon you — and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”

“Hence Christ will be formed in you, so that you no longer live – but Christ lives in you.” And Thomas, I hope you, like Mary will say, ‘be it done unto me according to your word’.” Several times, I have reread these simple, powerful and elegant words of Scripture and from Fr. Pat.

He helped give me hope that somehow God will see past all my failings – that somehow he will find reasons to give me the grace to do something for Him – IN OTHERS. And that’s why I’m here as a deacon. That’s why I’m up here in this ambo... because I want to remind you dear friends: Jesus is coming... we would do well to get busy preparing for it.

And perhaps you could finish Advent by reading and praying the words of today’s Gospel... And then let the Holy Spirit come upon you – and let the power of the Most High overshadow you... but you must be willing – to come to the point even in these last days before Christmas – to tell the Lord Jesus... let it be done to me – according to your word.

Jesus is coming. Get busy.

Reading 1

2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

When King David was settled in his palace, and the LORD had given him rest from his enemies on every side, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!” Nathan answered the king, “Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you.” But that night the LORD spoke to Nathan and said: “Go, tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Should you build me a house to dwell in?’

“It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth. I will fix a place for my people Israel; I will plant them so that they may dwell in their place without further disturbance. Neither shall the wicked continue to afflict them as they did of

old, since the time I first appointed judges over my people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also reveals to you that he will establish a house for you. And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever.”

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

R. (2a) For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever; through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your faithfulness. For you have said, “My kindness is established forever”; in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

“I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: Forever will I confirm your posterity and establish your throne for all generations.”

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

“He shall say of me, ‘You are my father, my God, the Rock, my savior.’ Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him, and my covenant with him stands firm.”

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Reading II

Rom 16:25-27

Brothers and sisters: To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel

Lk 1:26-38

The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.