

4th Sunday of Easter

Cycle C

Have you ever been driving and you want to get over, but you can't? You're kind of stuck between the person on your side going too fast and the person in front of you going too slow. There are a lot of those "in between" things in life. In football we often hear of a player being a "tweener". He is too small to play line and too big to be in the backfield. And sometimes, we are between jobs, or between paychecks.

Well, today is sort of like that. As I prayed about my topic for today I realized that I could not preach Christmas that's later in the week. And, it's really a little late to preach Advent after all we've been at it for four weeks now. Then it hit me. That's kind of where Mary was when she visited Elizabeth. She hadn't yet given birth, but she was really pregnant. I wondered as I prayed over this message if she was being looked down on having gotten pregnant before her marriage to Joseph. The scene in today's gospel is just so perfect. Elizabeth proclaims, "Why is it that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" and "When you entered the room the baby in my womb leaped for joy." Yet, I know that as a mother to be nears the end of the pregnancy it is not easy. She is tired and anxious. And really, isn't that how we all are about now, Tired and anxious?

The question for today is whether we are tired and anxious for the right reasons or the wrong reasons. Many are tired of the kids who are so excited about Santa Claus and so the shopping goes on and on and on and on and on..... Many are tired because of all the Christmas parties. In this corporate world we live in we get invited to parties by our clients, our co-workers, our employers and all sorts of folks who may have good intentions, but really does it miss the point? Does it miss the real purpose of this time?

The last three weeks should have been a time to prepare ourselves spiritually for the new beginning. Christmas truly is a time to put the past behind us and look forward into the future. It is a time to recommit ourselves and that recommitment is especially important in our spiritual lives. On the last Sunday of the previous liturgical year, on the Feast of Christ the King, I stood right here and asked if we were treating our Lord like a King. I suggested that we all take some time to ask ourselves if we were really putting Christ first in our lives. I gave examples of not putting Christ first in our lives and suggested that Advent was the perfect time to recommit ourselves to that goal. I hope that the last three weeks have been that for everyone. The good news is that it's not too late.

St. Paul speaks of endurance and perseverance in many of his letters. And perhaps that is the message for us today. The path Elizabeth took to motherhood was long and hard. She had to wait and it took faith to believe that she could conceive even in her old age. The trip to visit Elizabeth was probably tough for Mary who was with child. Just as these two women of the Scripture persevered, we are called to do likewise. We are almost to Christmas, but it is not too late to prepare. It is not too late to dedicate ourselves to a life that is rich and full spiritually.

There are obstacles that get in the way of our preparation. The ways of the world are not our ways and we tend to get lured into the hustle and bustle of the secular world of Christmas. But the first reading addresses another obstacle. The prophet tells us that even Bethlehem a small insignificant little village can rise to glory as the birthplace of the savior. How many of us feel small and insignificant? When I was growing up, my grandmother would take me to church and she would sit in the very back. I would either sit in the front or serve as an altar boy. She never went to Communion. I often wondered why, but being young, never worried about it for long. Later in life I found out that she felt separated from the Church because she was divorced. She did not feel worthy. Many people during this time experience a sense of unworthiness. Some have serious sins and don't think God would forgive them. Many feel separated for other reasons similar to my grandmother. The good news is that God wants to forgive everyone. God wants all of us to enter into a rich spiritual bond that begins with this community and manifests itself in a deep personal relationship with Him. If for whatever reason you feel alienated from this faith community, know that you are needed and that we want you to feel loved and wanted. And for the rest of us, we know that Christmas is one of the two times a year that many Catholics come home. Let us welcome home all of those that have been away by first of all encouraging them to join us on Christmas and then by opening our loving arms to them as they join us on Christmas. Paul tells us in the second reading that Jesus came to do the will of the Father so that all of us could be sanctified. Not a select few, but all.

So, this week, let us put aside our prejudices, our superior sense of self righteousness and devote this time to letting all see Christ in the way we live and love. Christ is not coming Friday. We only celebrate it Friday. He already came and He left us His Holy Spirit. Let us take the time this week to let that Spirit work within us to allow us to become the Christ child. To let us be filled with the love of Christ and then to show us how to share that love so that all can come to experience Peace on Earth; The kind of Peace that can only come from Jesus Christ.