

The 3rd Sunday of Advent
12/12&13/15

Fr. Andy Szebenyi, SJ
All Saints Parish, Syracuse

My dear Brothers and Sisters. If you look at the Advent wreath it has four candles. The first two refer to the historical Advent beginning with the promise of a Redeemer followed by waiting and hoping through centuries for the fulfillment of the promise. We might as well say that the second purple candle represents John the Baptist preparing the way of our Savior. The color of the first two candles is deep purple reflecting the mood of preparation and penance. The third candle symbolizes the joy of the historical Advent, the fulfillment of the promise, and now we can say: Emmanuel. The Lord has come. God is with us. The promise has been truly fulfilled. The fourth candle is again purple, representing the present times, the unfolding of God's presence in our lives today, the Advent in each one of us.

My Sisters and Brothers. A prophecy tells us the future with certainty. How do we foretell the future? There are three ways we can know the future. One is through a forecast, the other is by making a projection, and the third is through prophecy. The forecast is a probability calculation, like the weather forecast. We observe the weather and find a certain combination of conditions when it rained 30 times out of a hundred. Then we may find the very same combination of conditions again on a later date and we say that under these conditions the probability of rain is 30%, or in 3 out of 10 cases. This is, however, still just a probability and not a certainty.

What about a projection? Here we look at trends and then make an 'if – then' statement: If a given trend does not change, then we can project a value into the future. This projected value will become a reality if the trend did not change. We use such calculation in many situations, such as population growth, global warming, climate change and so on. Here is an example. In the year 2011, according to the World Watch Institute, the global human population was 6.987 billion, and the rate of natural increase was 1.2%. If the 1.2% increase would form a trend for many years, then the global human population would double in 58 years according to the formula, where doubling time is given as the ratio of 70 over % of natural increase. That would then mean that the global human population will be very close to 14 billion (13.974 billion) in the year 2069. Do projections speak with certitude? Not really, because trends do change. I know that the Earth cannot support that many people even if we were to distribute the available resources equally.

Then what about a prophecy? Does prophecy provide certitude? It certainly does, not like forecast and prediction. Here God speaks through the prophet. And, of course, God knows what we call future, because God is not in time. God is he One who IS in absolute present that has no beginning and no end end. And such a thought boggles one's mind because time and space are the created

framework of a created world that we understand in our created way, in time and space. We simply cannot know what absolute present really means. When Moses asked God at the burning bush what to say if the Israelites ask: Who sent you? God said to Moses, 'This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.' (Exodus 3:14) What God says is certain. God promised the Savior, and the promise has been fulfilled. Today we can truly say: Rejoice! God is with us for certain! Let us open our hearts and minds to receive with faith the great mystery of Christmas, the fulfillment of the promise, not only in our past history, but right here and now in our personal lives. Heaven and earth were united in Jesus the Son of God, and the son of Mary. Let us rejoice because we can now truly say: Emmanuel! God is with us. Amen.