

December 20, 2020
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE C

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I was a sponsor for our recent Confirmation ceremony at the Cathedral. Some of us were mystified by the homily of Bishop Lucia – he said, “one thing I really want you to remember from your Confirmation Day is PRNDL.” And he went on to talk about P and R and so on. When Christian and I got back in my car to drive back to the East side, I looked down at my stick, and said “AHA!!!” Look Christian, PRNDL.

Everything Bishop Lucia said came rushing back to mind: “This past year, 2020, we sometimes may have wondered, where is God? Well, do not expect a magic trick out of heaven to clear away everything we don’t like. But this we know for sure, Emmanuel – God is with us. Whichever letter where your stick is stuck, God is with you in that moment of your journey.

P—park, at certain times, park is the best position for you. God is with you.

R – reverse, a glance backward will help you later go forward. God is with you.

N – neutral, the engine is still running, but it is best you stay still. God is with you.

D – drive, but not too fast, look where you are going, life is short. God is with you.

L – low gear, definitely time to slow down, take it easy. God is with you. “

Our Advent journey has featured Isaiah and John the Baptist, but on the 4th Sunday of Advent, we focus on Mary. The Blessed Mother was not in a motor vehicle, but even on that iconic donkey, I am sure some of PRNDL would apply. As Mary travelled to Bethlehem with the child stirring in her womb, and through the first years of her child’s life, how might she have experienced PRNDL? Parked in Bethlehem, until the slaughter of the Innocents; then in Drive, getting out of town rushing to Egypt; then in Neutral, in Egypt hoping to return to the Holy Land; then in Reverse, an exile remembers the great things God has done for her; then in Low Gear, as the Holy Family slowly and in secret make their way back to Israel, to that unknown backwater town of Nazareth.

Today the Church asks us to meditate on the Annunciation, on the words of Gabriel, which is the first half of the Hail Mary. To that question of receiving God, she said YES! Angel means messenger, and whether it was the Angel P or R or N or

D or L, in each of these different circumstances, there was a special message; and there was a recurring message -- God was with her.

Each of those moments, too, were Annunciations! Why limit it to the first one? True that was the key in the ignition which started the Mission. But if Gabriel is the visiting angel of Mission, we, or many of us, were visited in 2020 by the Nameless Angel of Intermission. As I read it, Mary was often in park and neutral, or you might say INTER-MISSION. What's important is Mary's ability to ponder. Pondering was the portal through which many angels or messages came to her.

We are getting closer to the New Year. This is a kind of liminal moment, for the whole world, how will Christ be born, in our midst, how will God be with us in 2021? Of course, no one knows. I do know this – there will be PRNDL moments in the year ahead. Whichever it is, even then, at that moment, Emmanuel. God is with you. My advice is say YES! And Ponder what wants to be born in these pregnant moments.

I am sure in her 30 years with Jesus and Joseph in Nazareth, Mary did many other things, but the only one mentioned in the Gospels is that SHE PONDERED, “she pondered all these things in her heart.” Whether we are in park, reverse, neutral or low gear, we can ponder. How wasted any life, devoid of reflection. What else do we hope for at the end of it all, except to have gained a few drops of wisdom.

We look forward to the vaccine, and our lives gearing up again. The temptation in 2021 might be that we find ourselves only in drive, speeding through the year, without pondering. Perhaps as you reflect on your New Year's resolution you might think of spending some time in PRNL, just so that D does not dominate 2021, and we lose our new habit of pondering.

I sometimes have imagined spending a few hours with Mary, how would it be? I think she would pour us both a cup of tea and set out a plate of scones, sit down at table, and say: “Tell me.”

Imagine it yourself. What would you tell your mother, she who ponders. You talk for a couple of hours, she listening, very intently, not saying much. After you have said everything you wanted to say, Mary will say a few words, a very few words to you. What did she say?

During the week ahead, I suggest that you imagine those few words or sentences Mary says to you. Those words of wisdom, might be helpful in the months ahead.

FYI, whenever I have tried doing the meditation I've just suggested, mostly I hear what John Lennon heard her saying.

“When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of Wisdom: Let It Be. Let It Be.”

Most of us only need a caring, perceptive listener to listen, and we discover, as we are speaking our truth to one who understands us, that we, for the first time, hear **ourselves**, and understand **ourselves**, and we know then what we need to do.

No wonder, the Gospel tells us Jesus, in Nazareth, grew in wisdom. How could it not be when he could talk everything over with a loving friend, known as Grace, Full of Grace. She is there for you, too; she's listening, with the heart of a mother.

I will close my reflection with a little prayer -- the second part of the Hail Mary added in the 14th century, during the Bubonic Plague, to ask for the Blessed Mother's protection from that fatal disease. But I will paraphrase it for our moment in the final days of 2020.

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now at the end of 2020; and, at the dawn of a new year let us see Emmanuel, God is With Us! In all things and at all times, Emmanuel.”

Wherever your stick is stuck, P or R or N or D or L, **ponder how** God is with you.

Amen.