

Dec. 1 & 2, 2018
1st Sunday of Advent

Kathleen Owens
All Saints Parish, Syr., NY

Homily for the First Week in Advent

As we begin December, there are signs of Christmas everywhere - cars with trees on top, homes with trees decorated and shining through windows - carols or songs from within every store we enter - ads on TV for the most wonderful gifts - movies of love and romance.

Pat Lorenz was a Mom that wanted her family to have a more religious tone to Advent, so she asked her 9 year old son to set up the manger scene. Andrew brought out the box and unwrapped all the figures of shepherds, animals, wise men and of course, Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus.

When Pat went to check on the scene it was beautifully set up, except - there was no Baby Jesus. "Hmmm"...she thought and went back to finish preparing supper. When she opened the bread box, there, next to the bread was the figure of Baby Jesus. She called Andrew, asking, "Why did you put the Baby Jesus here?" "Oh", he answered, "in religion class our teacher said Jesus was the Bread of Life, Mom. Besides, he shouldn't be in the manger until Christmas!" Well, she thought, he was listening...

Pat's concern though is real. The meaning of Advent is missing today as we are faced with the commercialism of the season. Yet, to concentrate only on the birth of Jesus is missing the meaning of Advent as well. While the manger scene is holy and lovely, it is only a springboard for our prayer and not our central focus. Think about it...we don't celebrate a birthday by pulling out the baby pictures or the nursery. Advent then is about more than reflecting on Jesus in the Manger, although that is a wonderful part of it.

Like a birthday - the celebration is about the life of the person - all they have come to mean to us since their birth. So Advent helps us stop and reflect on all Jesus has become for us. Advent is a time to reflect on Jesus - the Christ, and realizing the time when our world was ready to grasp the truth that God's desire was to be united with us, God's desire for us to realize that and for us to understand it had always existed. God's Presence became visible in the Person of Jesus....so we can ask the questions and find answers to: Who is God? and What is God like?

The ancient idea of a powerful God with unlimited control was over. God gives control to us in our freedom - as parents give it to their growing children. That reality becomes visible in the manger scene. God - in Jesus - was as helpless as any baby, totally dependent on the care of Mary and Joseph. They gave their lives to protecting him, nurturing Him, until He was old enough to venture out on his own. Oh, ours is a humble God!

Throughout Jesus' adult life we see God revealed in His care of people - His love for them - His ability to see within them to the core of their goodness and call it forth. We see His strength and authority to recognize the injustice within and to call it out! We see His courage and love to

stand before the evil in people and never flinch - never back down from the truth... believing that every single person is a loved child of God, deserving of integrity, respect and support.

When birthdays are celebrated people gather and share stories of the life of this birthday person. These stories may range from childhood stories of the school play to sports or even being the Yearbook editor. They could include that search for their first job - their funny mistakes or joyful achievements.

But the celebration is about the whole life - all that has gone into the person- blowing out the candles. The whole life that has developed and evolved into the celebrant - making a wish as the cake is cut.

That is Advent - reflecting on Jesus - letting our minds reflect on those wonderful Gospel stories that reveal the inner Heart of God. We have passed through centuries of darkness and violence, but also through times of growth and achievement. Today, 2000 and more years later - we still return to the Manger, but unless we also reflect on how our Emmanuel ~ God-with-us ~ has been present through all the seasons of the centuries, we are missing the truth and meaning of our Christmas celebration.

Even more important, Advent is also about looking ahead; for we who love and give ourselves to this loving Christ, are the only means for future people to know and grasp the truth our loving God has entrusted to us. We are the ones to fulfill the Christmas Promise! Listen more carefully to the words of our Advent and Christmas Carols.

O come, O come, Emmanuel - Glory to God - Peace on Earth - O Come All Ye Faithful
Go, Tell It On the Mountain - in other words:

We become the manger scene!

We are the **Star** - that leads those seeking peace - those seeking the way to live safely - desiring work to support and educate their families.

We are the **Shepherds** - watching over God's loved ones - leading them in the way of Christ-

Parents - teachers - of all ages and all areas - hold them within their care

People of every walk of life touch the lives of others - watching over them - for even a minute - but within that minute can be a resounding connection of care felt...

We are the **Wise Men** - willing to travel miles to seek an inner longing for a mysterious **more...** a **more** that transcends the everyday life and searches deeper for meaning and purpose.

We are the **Innkeeper** - sharing the last place left to help another...

We are **Mary and Joseph** - everyday people who realize everyone we meet is God's child.

They aren't all babies or children - but a person in *need of nourishment* - food or friendship, *a home* - seen in a heart that feels safe, *guidance* - for simple directions or time given to listening and understanding, *prayer* - love shared with our inner God to provide and protect.

We are Mary and Joseph when our hearts reach out to the suffering of our world - when children of all ages, all races and all countries become one family to us.

The **Manger bed** is in our hearts where we welcome ways to provide a place where our Humble God can dwell.

I'd like to give one more example of why we must hold the whole life of Jesus in our hearts during Advent. Back in 2012 I was still working at St. Francis Xavier in Marcellus. The music director and I put together the Christmas Pageant each year. Her Children's choir interspersed music with the narrative and I had the task of keeping the excited children in place for their cues to parts as shepherds, etc.

On the day of our dress rehearsal a Dad called me and asked if his 3 year old could join her 5 year old sister and be a shepherd. She wanted that so badly and he assured me she could follow directions. Well, of course, one can always use another shepherd. So we had our rehearsal and little Mary did just fine being awed by the angels and going to the manger. Later, in the slightly chaotic scene of parents picking up the children, the 5 year old older sister came and told me Mary was crying. I beckoned her over and asked, "Mary, what's the matter?" She hesitated and then said: "But He died!" "But He died!"

Her Mom had joined us by that time and we just looked at one another. That little one had put together the human experience of Jesus and believed it ended when He was crucified. I never in my life ever knew a child to be so perceptive and I am sure her Mom and Dad went home to talk about Easter....

But that is the perfect reason why we need to spend Advent on the whole revelation of this great gift of the Incarnation! The Promise of Christmas never ends! We are called to be that Presence and reveal the wonderful words:

Joy to the World! The Lord is Come!

Let Every Heart prepare Him Room!