**Dec. 6-7, 2014 4th Sunday of Advent All Saints Parish**

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**Alive with the Goodness of God!**

The readings for the Second Sunday of Advent are so full of beauty and exhortation that it is difficult to choose just what to reflect upon! The theme of all the readings, of course, is preparation. In Isaiah and 2 Peter, the preparation is for the coming of the glory God. In Mark, it is preparation for the coming of the Messiah. At the time of Isaiah, mountains were literally lowered and valleys were actually raised to prepare a roadway that would make it easy for the king to access the city of Jerusalem. Mark is asking us to bring the preparation inward, to straighten the roadways to our hearts to make it welcoming for the Messiah to reside within us.

We know that, historically, the Messiah has come. But Peter reminds us that the Messiah is always coming; that we have an on-going task to make ready the way of the Lord in our world. How do we do this? We do it by becoming conscious of the inequities within our world, our nation, our cities and neighborhoods and trying to do our part in eliminating them. Many times we spend our whole lives trying to make society more “uneven” than even. Pope Francis has called our attention to this by speaking against the economic systems that guarantee that inequities will persist. For example, in business we try to hire employees for the least they will work for rather than for what we may be able to hire them for and still remain financially sound. God’s justice that Peter reminds us of is to give people what they need. Perhaps CEO’s of major companies could do with less and the employees could do with more. As we know, that is not about to happen, but if and when it does happen, God’s justice will reside among us and salvation will be ours. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. God’s justice will reign when we celebrate our common humanity by taking care of others as we take care of ourselves. Of course, that presumes that we know how to take care of ourselves.

When I was in grade school studying the commandments, I was taught that the commandment Thou shall not kill, referred not only to physically killing another person, but also not taking care of ourselves, of, symbolically, killing ourselves. Perhaps as we try to humanize others by sharing their burdens, we might also try to humanize ourselves by shedding some of our self-imposed burdens. I know I became a better teacher when I gave up trying to be the best teacher. That freed up my mind to concentrate on my students rather than myself. We don’t have to be the perfect teacher, the perfect parent, the perfect employer or employee. We do need, though, to be an authentic teacher, parent, employer or employee, to make our actions match our words; to be genuine.

Last Thursday evening, I taught my final class at Le Moyne College. I decided it was time. I think I remained in teaching so long, though, because I was always learning something knew that helped me in my life and which I hoped helped students, also. This past semester I gained inspiration from Michael Himes who teaches theology at Boston College. He speaks of original sin – and I use that term as a metaphor – as not really believing that we are truly created in the image of God, as not accepting our humanity and wanting to be more. Further, he speaks of the incarnation, of God’s throwing the divine lot in with humanity, as God’s attempt to say, Being human is wonderful. It is a blessed condition. I think this is worth reflecting upon.

In the distant past that some of us still remember, either personally or through the stories our parents or grandparents have told us, life was seen as not so good. The spirituality of those times told us that life on earth, this valley of tears, was something to be endured rather than to be embraced. We waited to be free from this vale of tears and to be welcomed into heaven. But if we believe that salvation, our being made whole or cured, depends on our embracing our humanity, then we will commit ourselves to dealing with the joys and the sorrows that life brings. We will not necessarily yearn – until it is time to yearn – to be finished with the messiness of what living throws in our path.

As we know, the Scriptures, although they may recount what happened in the past, are a call to live more authentically in the present. We are all called to be John the Baptist. John announces the coming of the Messiah. He calls us to repentance. Of what do we need to repent? Perhaps, in this day and age, we need to repent of not embracing the goodness of our humanity by refusing to go inward and find there, in our very center, Christ. My piano teacher says that our sometimes extreme focus on electronics and social media are a cultural barrier that prevents our going inward – and, therefore, feeling deeply the ups and downs of life, the passion to love that grace creates in us. Without interior feeling, we cannot produce music nor can we live deeply our humanity.

We are called not only to revere our humanity but the humanity of all others, also. In fact we are called to honor our connection to all of creation, not only human creation. Everything is interconnected. Everything is alive with the goodness of God. When we light our candles in the morning darkness to think for a few moments the wondrous event that Christmas commemorates, and as we review our day in the evening, perhaps we could spend a few minutes thinking about how blessed is the gift of our humanity, so blessed that Divine Mystery itself embraces it.