

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Advent, Cycle A

*Isaiah 11: 1-10 + Psalm 72 + Romans 15: 4-9 + Matthew 3: 1-12*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: December 4, 2016

The Gospel of Matthew could be called the “Gospel of Hope.”

Over and over again, the evangelist Matthew quotes passages of the Old Testament to show what God promised to do, God does.

Matthew’s Gospel reveals how the Sacred Scriptures encourage us to hope in the promises of God.

Hope is a forgotten virtue.

Of the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love---

faith and love seem to receive all the attention while hope is often left out of the picture.

But hope is needed more than ever before,

which is why the Advent Season is so important,

for Advent is the “Season of Hope.”

During Advent we are not “pretending” as if the One for whom we hope has not yet been born.

Rather as we prepare for the great celebration of Christ’s birth,

Advent gives us the time to notice where we have misplaced our hopes, where our hopes have been misdirected.

For too often we place our hope in things or people

who ultimately cannot satisfy our deepest longings and greatest desires.

Which is why John the Baptist plays a central role in every Advent, calling us to “repent” for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand, close enough to touch.

Too often we are looking elsewhere instead of seeing what is right in front of us.

We place our hope in the wrong things, and Advent not only sheds light on that truth, but also challenges us to open our lives more fully

to receive the One who is the source of Hope,

the One who is the fulfillment of all of God’s promises.

Repent, taken from the Greek word, “metanoiēn” means putting on a new mind.

Not simply changing our way of thinking, but putting on a new mind.

This “new mindset” causes us to ask foundational questions about who we are, where we are going, and how we are going to get there.

**Who are we?**

We are pilgrims on a journey, returning home to the God who has made us for Himself. We have forgotten who we are, which is why God's very own Son took our flesh, revealed to us our dignity, and showed us the way back home to the Father. We have come from the heart of God and are called to return to the God who has created us out of love and made us for eternal love.

**Where are we going?** To the everlasting feast of the Kingdom of heaven.

We are not going to get to Oklahoma City if we are going west toward Union City. That's why "repent" also means to "turn around." To recognize we are heading in the wrong direction, and turn our lives around and strike out in the right direction. These hope-filled Advent days reveal to us that we often settle for too little, instead of moving forward into the abundant life God promises. We are going to the feast of the Kingdom of Heaven---this is where our lives are pointed. Everything that we say and do needs be directed toward this goal, move us closer to the eternal feast of God's love for us.

**How are we going to get there?** Not alone. Not on our own power. We need others.

Companions encourage us to persevere in this journey back home. Companions in hope urge us on by their love, giving us strength to endure whatever challenges come our way. These companions are present to us here in the flesh, our brothers and sisters in hope on earth. But our companions are also those in heaven, who encourage us by their example and by their prayers. One such special companion, a source of great hope for the Church in Oklahoma, is Fr. Stanley Rother, who Pope Francis declared this past Friday to be a martyr.

Of course, the companion who assists us on our pilgrim journey is Jesus Christ. The Risen Son of God walks by our side each day, to enlighten and strengthen us, to free us of whatever weighs us down on this pilgrimage of hope, leading us home to the Father's embrace.

Jesus Christ reveals to us the God of endurance and encouragement. The God who patiently endures our wandering away, who endures our futile attempts to make this earth our lasting home, who encourages us to not settle for anything less than the fullness of life and joy to which we are called.

The most basic and yet most powerful way God encourages us in our life-long pilgrimage is by the gift of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist gives us courage to keep moving forward in our pilgrimage of faith.

The Eucharist is the Source our hope and is the Summit of hope---

from this mountain top we see more clearly who we are and where we are going.

The Eucharist which we celebrate each Sunday reminds us of who we are--- pilgrims who need heavenly food for the journey to the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we are fed by the Word of God and nourished at this holy table,

we are also reminded where we are going---to the eternal feast of God's love.

Here we have a foretaste of the feast to come, where all our hopes will be fulfilled.

The Eucharist is also a great source of hope because it fosters gratitude.

A culture which would have us settle for less,

which encourages us to be "settlers" on this earth,

to put our roots down in this passing world,

constantly points out to us what we do not have, what we lack.

Such a culture fosters the deadly sin of envy, which kills hope.

Thus, the Eucharist is counter-cultural, because at celebration of the Mass:

We see what we have been given instead of what we lack.

We notice what is there rather than what is not there.

We see the One who is standing right in front of us---Christ the Lord---

who gives himself to us as heavenly food and drink,

giving us the courage to keep on keeping on in our journey home.

As our hope is strengthened at this holy feast, we are sent forth to be ministers of hope.

Given courage by this feast, which points to the feast of all feasts,

we can bring the One who is the source of All Hope to others who hunger for Him.

Hope gives us work to do!

It is precisely because we are confident of the hope God holds out for us

that we can attend to the needs of others

and do what we can to work for the world's healing.

Far from allowing us to turn our backs on the world, hope commissions us

to bring God's love, mercy, justice and compassion to life in the world.

This is the fruit which our lives of hope are to produce.

As Pope Benedict said in his encyclical "Spe Salvi" (Saved in Hope),

"All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action." (#35)

This is our call---to be that hope in action.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi