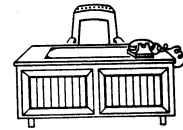


4th Sunday of Advent / Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

December 22, 2019
December 25, 2019



From the Desk of
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

The lighting of the last Advent candle marks the conclusion of the journey we began four Sundays ago. Though Advent does not officially end until Christmas Eve, it feels great finally to light all four candles to complete the Advent circle. The Advent journey is both challenging and rewarding, and presents great opportunities for spiritual enrichment. With all four candles burning, we feel encircled by the light of Christ, with no dark corners of trepidation.

In ancient Greece, the winner at an Olympic game was not the first person who got to the finish line. At the start of a race, each runner received a lighted torch to carry for the duration of the race. The first person to get to the finish line with his light still burning won the race. It was a novel idea intended to cut down on recklessness and irresponsible behavior during the race.

Advent is a race of sorts where we, the runners, are carrying lighted torches. The most important thing is not to finish the race, rather to finish with our torches still burning. Hence, the question is - are we still on fire with the love of God and neighbor? Are we still on fire with the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation? Are we on fire with the desire for peace and justice? The various spiritual and temporal activities of Advent help to keep the flame alive in our hearts. Certainly, we thank God for the strength and requisite determination to finish the race with our torches still burning.

If we prepared well for Christmas, the baby Jesus will find us at peace and glowing with joy at his birth. Christmas is the most memorable birthday in human history. It is a special moment when the divine and the human natures come together. As John's gospel states in the Christmas day gospel, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The incarnation ushered in a new epoch in human experience. The birth of Jesus made a transcendent God immanent and broke down the immense barrier between God and humans. Jesus made it possible for us to feel comfortable in God's presence without the overwhelming sense of fear and shame associated with sin and guilt.

As we unwrap gifts this Christmas, we should not forget the greatest gift of all – God's gift of his Son to the world. Christmas often highlights the inequalities in our society. While some receive tons of gifts, others are lucky to receive a single gift. Some spoiled children showered with gifts on Christmas have little time to spend on any particular gift. They hurriedly unwrap a gift, take a quick glance at it, toss it aside and move on to the next package. They are overwhelmed rather than ungrateful. On the contrary, we should take time unwrapping God's special gift of His Son this Christmas.

One of the most striking aspects of Christmas is the very idea of divine vulnerability. It is humbling to see the second person of the Trinity lying helplessly in a manger. As a fully human baby, Jesus lay defenseless in a manger and radically dependent on the nurturing love of his human parents, Mary and Joseph. Just think about it. That the most powerful God among us in the form of a baby blows the mind. The very idea of a Baby-God is one of the things that make Christianity unique among religions. Christmas makes God more relatable.

Christmas is a celebration of love. It is a celebration of God's unconditional love for us in sending his Son for human salvation. It is an invitation to love God back and to love one another. Hence, where hatred reigns we strive to overcome with the power of love. This demands understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation. Christmas presents opportunity for growth as we reflect on the power of love and make resolutions for the New Year.

Wishing everyone Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Fr. Romanus

