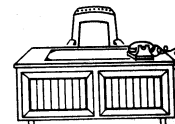


4th Sunday of Advent
The Nativity of the Lord
December 23, 24 & 25, 2018



From the Desk of
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

Merry Christmas:

The lighting of the last Advent candle marks the conclusion of a journey we began four Sundays ago. Though Advent does not officially end until Christmas Eve, it feels great to light all four candles, completing 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.

We could also imagine Advent as a race of sorts where the runners are carrying lighted torches. The most important thing is not finishing the race rather finishing 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?

Christmas is here and we are thrilled. The birth of Jesus re-establishes the channels of grace ruptured by the sins of our first parents. It also marks the beginning of a new epoch in human history, an epoch permeated by divine love. Our response is one of humble gratitude to God for giving us a second chance. We are also grateful to Jesus for his commitment to our salvation. He is the realization of the divine assistance (Emmanuel - God is with us) long promised through the mouth of the prophets.

That Christmas is a very special time of the year is evident in the music, decorations, and the various festive celebrations. There will also be plenty of opportunities to encounter the secular characters of the season, namely, Santa Claus, Frosty the snowman, Rudolf the reindeer, and others. As we celebrate these characters, let us not forget the main character in this Christmas narrative, Jesus Christ. Neither should we forget the major supporting characters, Mary and Joseph. Their openness to God's salvific plan for humanity made everything possible.

Christmas is not a merely secular holiday with some religious connotation as some claim, nor a baptized pagan celebration embellished with biblical meaning. The incarnation is at the roots of our understanding of Christmas. Christmas gives us an opportunity to express gratitude to God for the extraordinary gift of his Son. One could say with impunity that Christmas gifts are token manifestations of the spirit of generosity initiated by God. The monetary value of a Christmas gift is not as important as what it symbolizes to both the giver and the receiver. As we unwrap our gifts this Christmas, we ought not to forget the greatest gift of all - God's gift of his Son as a symbol of His unconditional love for us.

It is hard to imagine that a fragile baby born in a manger over two thousand years ago would grow up to accomplish so much. The hope and the future of humankind rested on his fragile shoulders, and he did not disappoint. We know, of course, that he was not merely human but also the second person of the Trinity. He is God incarnate and bears the invaluable gift of God's love for humankind and his desire to save us from sin and death.

I pray that this Christmas will involve a gradual unwrapping of God's unconditional love for you and your loved ones this year and in the upcoming years.

Wishing Everyone Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Fr. Romanus