

Third Sunday of Advent – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
16/17 December 2017

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11
Luke 1 (Isaiah 61:10b)
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
(Isaiah 61:1 (Luke 4:18)) John 1:6-8, 19-28

Gaudete Sunday – Paradox of Faith

When I was a child, our elementary school had a Christmas Store set up in our library the week before Christmas break. This allowed us grade schoolers to have the experience of shopping and buying our own gifts for our family. Each classroom had the opportunity to browse through the gift options of moderately-priced: knickknacks, coffee mugs, picture frames, and other small housewares. When we had made our choices, someone from the school recorded our order and totaled up the price. Then we were sent home with that price and told our parents how much *they* had to pay so that we could purchase Christmas gifts for them and our other family members. We came back to school with cash or check in hand (from our parents) in order to complete the transaction, and we were able to return home with our very own gifts to wrap and put under the Christmas tree for our family.

The Christmas Store was a practical experience that taught us a little bit about shopping and buying but, more importantly, gave us the joy of picking out special gifts for loved ones and then being able to share those gifts with them. I remember feeling that these were some of the first gifts that were actually *from me*. And they *were* from me – I did the shopping by myself; thought about the people I wanted to buy for; and picked out gifts I thought they would like. But, at the same time, those gifts would not have been *from me* without my parents *giving me* the money to pay for them. And there is somewhat of a paradox – somewhat of a contradiction – contained in this: I could only give gifts *to my parents*, because *they* were generous *to me*.

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We also find that our Christian faith is full of paradoxes.ⁱ Things that at first seem contradictory to our reason, but that are profoundly true: foolishness is wisdom; weakness is strength;ⁱⁱ the least become the greatest;ⁱⁱⁱ eternal life comes through death.^{iv}

And today, now that we are over half way through our Season of Advent, we celebrate *Gaudete Sunday – Gaudete*, which means *Rejoice!* We rejoice today because we are so close to celebrating the greatest paradox of all: *that God became human*. That God came into our world as a baby. That He became a man who died for our sins; by dying destroyed death, so that we would die no more, but have eternal life with Him in Heaven.^v

For the second Sunday in a row, we hear John the Baptist crying out to us, urging us to get ready to receive this paradox as the greatest Truth: “make straight the way of the Lord!”^{vi} *Prepare the way of the Lord!* He urges us to make preparation in our hearts and in our world so that we are ready to receive Jesus Christ at Christmas.

During these first three weeks of Advent, we’ve been thinking about this question, *How do we prepare the way of the Lord? What kinds of things can I do during Advent to prepare my heart to welcome Jesus into our world?* We’ve had many possibilities available to us here at Holy Family: making a good confession; reflecting each day with the Little Blue Advent Book; reading our parish storybook *Jotham’s Journey*; checking out the online resources at the Formed or Dynamic Catholic websites; giving a gift to the Giving Tree; and countless other things that any of us can do during Advent. And if you’ve been meaning to do something, but it hasn’t quite happened yet, don’t worry – it’s not too late! As we heard today from John the Baptist himself, *now* is still the time; *now* is a good time; *now* is the right time to *prepare the way of the Lord!*

This past week, our parish schoolchildren gave us a beautiful image of what preparing the way of the Lord looks like. During their Advent Program here in the church, they brought out a manger and placed it up here in the sanctuary. Between each song, a few children shared some acts of kindness that they had done during Advent. With each act of kindness, a piece of hay was placed in the manger: helping a classmate with homework; showing good sportsmanship in a game; telling the truth; helping to clean something up; asking and giving forgiveness. As the pieces of hay piled up, we could all see how each small act of kindness added up in a big way to prepare a comfortable resting place in the manger for the Newborn Jesus. This is what preparing the way of the Lord looks like. Each act of love that we do – small or big – makes a huge difference, because it makes Jesus' love more and more present in our hearts and in our world.

But even in our acts of love there is a paradox. At Mass on Friday morning, I asked the students: *How do you know what things to do in order to make a comfortable place for Jesus in our world?* The kids knew the answer right way: *Because God teaches us and shows us the way.* This is the paradox of Advent; the paradox of preparing the way of the Lord: we only know how to prepare the way for Jesus because *He* is the one who inspires us and teaches us how to prepare the way *for* Him. Our children can do acts of kindness to prepare a place for Jesus because their parents and teachers teach them about Jesus' love. My classmates and I could give Christmas presents to our parents because they were giving to us.

All the love we share is because Jesus loves us first.^{vii} All the good we do is because Jesus shows us what goodness looks like. When we ask for and give forgiveness to others, it is because Jesus has forgiven us.^{viii} He shows us what love, goodness, and forgiveness look like on the Cross. Preparing the way of the Lord means going the way of love, goodness, forgiveness,

self-sacrifice, Resurrection, and healing. Preparing the way of the Lord means following Jesus to the Cross that leads to eternal life.

It is only when we live a life of the Cross – love, goodness, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, Resurrection, and healing – that we will become more and more able to recognize Jesus in our world, and welcome His Light into our hearts. It is only when we live a life of the Cross that we will be able to testify to the Light of Christ and help others see that Light, to see Jesus in us, so that they can also come to believe in Him and welcome Him into their hearts.^{ix} My friends, the paradox of Advent is that we will only be able to live a life of the Cross, testify to His Light, prepare the way of Jesus – when we ask Jesus to *prepare us* for the way.^x

ⁱ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1717; also see Definition for “Paradox” in *Catholic Dictionary*:

“An apparent contradiction that is really true. Christianity is the religion of paradox: that God would be human, that life comes from death, that achievement comes through failure, that folly is wisdom, that happiness is to mourn, that to find one must lose, and that the greatest are the smallest. What is paradoxical about the mysteries of the faith is that reason cannot fully penetrate their meaning, so that what seems contradictory to reason is profoundly true in terms of faith.”

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 1:21-25; 1 Corinthians 3:19

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 20:26, 23:11; Luke 9:48, 22:26

^{iv} John 11:25-26

^v *The Nicene Creed*: “For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried...”

^{vi} John 1:23; also, from Second Sunday of Advent, Mark 1:3: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”

^{vii} 1 John 4:19: “We love because he first loved us.”

^{viii} Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

^{ix} John 1:6-8

^x Prayer of Fr. Leo Clifford, OFM: “O Lord, You who have prepared a path for my soul, prepare my soul for that path.”