

Father O'Connor's Homily for 28 November 2021  
First Sunday of Advent-C

Jeremiah 33: 14-16  
1 Thessalonians 3: 12-4: 2  
Luke 21: 25-28

*After last weekend's HEART OF A SHEPHERD in-pew Commitment Sunday, I am happy to report the results as of this past Tuesday:*

*Nativity Parish has raised \$64,325 [from 34 families] which is 99% of its goal of \$64,987. The amount raised is just \$662 shy of the target.*

*Saint Joseph Parish has raised \$515,998 [from 123 families] which is 128% of its goal of \$403,327.*

*These are preliminary results, as there still needs to be "a second look" to be sure that the pledges made all correspond to the correct parish for each donor.*

*And, of course, pledges and gifts are still welcome! To those who have already contributed, I offer you my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation. Well done, Nativity and Saint Joseph parishioners! Thank you all so very, very much!*

There is a shift in the mood of the liturgy today.

Last weekend, the last Sunday of the Church year, was the Feast of Christ the King, a day when we were decked out in vestments of white and gold, and we heard of the triumph of Christ's coming in glory and judgment at the end of time.

This Sunday, the First Sunday of Advent (and Advent means "coming"), we are a bit more somber, decked out in violet, and we light the first candle of the Advent wreath.

We completed a Church year and we open a new one today.

Whenever we finish a year and begin a new one, two questions come to mind. One is rather uplifting: how has God touched you this past year in all of the good things that have happened in your life?

The second question is more serious: how has God touched you this past year in all of the tough things that have happened in your life?

Advent reminds us that God is always with us: in the good times and in the tough times.

I would like to tell you a story about a gentleman whose name was Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. [1912-2004].

Henry was born without fully-developed legs. Henry learned to walk on those stumps, but he suffered the ridicule of the other kids at school. Coming home crying and hurt, he would ask his mother: "Why did this happen to me?"

His mother used to say: "Henry, before you were born God called a council of the angels. And God said to them: 'We are going to send a very talented little boy into the world with a disability.' And the angels asked: 'Where shall you send him?' And God said: 'We are going to send him to the Viscardis, because there is a lot of love in that family, and they will know best how to love Henry.'"

That used to make Henry feel pretty good: to know that God had something special for him to do. So early on in life Henry made up his mind that he was going to accomplish some great things.

Henry did well in school. As a matter of fact he graduated from Fordham University. But by then he had done a lot of damage to those stumps by all of the walking. Medical people told him that it was impossible to fit him with artificial legs. But Dr. Robert Yanover was willing to try.... and he succeeded. With his new legs, Henry moved from being 3 feet 8 inches tall, to being 5 feet 8 inches tall. For the first time in his life, Henry could stand and look people straight in the eyes.

Henry wanted to pay the good doctor. "No bill at all," Dr. Yanover said. "Just bring to others what I brought to you and I'll be well repaid." So Henry set out to do just that.

When World War II broke out, Henry joined the Red Cross, and he had a special interest in soldiers who had lost a limb.

When the war was over, he turned his attention to disabled veterans who were unemployed. He ran an organization called "Just One Break" – "JOB," a program to integrate persons with disabilities into regular jobs. He then served as a disabilities advisor to eight United States Presidents, from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter, until Henry's death in 2004.

I tell you this story about Henry Viscardi because it is easy to sense the presence of God when things are going very well. It is much more difficult when things are tough. But God is ALWAYS with us.

We look for signs of God's presence. During this season of the year when the days are shorter and the nights are longer, when the temperatures are colder and the ice and snow are here, we look for signs of hope.

The Cherokee Indians had an insight about this. Here is a story that comes from them:

When God created the world, God gave a gift to each of His handiwork. And each gift came with a test.

And so God said to the trees and the plants: “You will be the guardians of the forest. Even in the dead of winter your brother and sister creatures will be protected in your branches. Your test is to stay awake and keep watch over the forest for the next seven days and seven nights.”

The young trees and plants were so excited to be entrusted with such an important job that the first night they found it easy to stay awake.

The second night was more difficult and a few fell asleep.

Even more fell asleep during the nights that followed.

By the time the seventh night came, the only trees and plants that were still awake were: the cedar, the pine, the spruce, the fir, the holly and the ivy.

“What faithful endurance you have,” exclaimed God. “You shall be given the gift of remaining green forever.”

And ever since, all the other trees and plants lose their leaves and sleep all winter long, while the evergreens, ever alert, give color to the bleak landscape.

The evergreens are around all year long, but we pay special attention to them this time of the year. They are a symbol to us that God is with us – when the sun is bright, when the darkness moves in, when the weather is warm, when the weather is cold. God is always with us: in the good times and in the tough times of life.

On this first Sunday of Advent we begin a brand new Church year. In our darkest season, we light the first candle of the Advent wreath, a symbol of Christ, the Light of the World. And His name is Emmanuel, a name which means “God is with us.”

The four candles mark the four weeks of Advent, as we prepare for His coming at Christmas and for His second coming at the end of time. And notice the branches of the wreath. They are evergreens. They are a sign of hope that God will be with us as this year unfolds – in the good times and in the tough times that lie ahead.

God has sent His only Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. His name is Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.” And the love of Christ for us is ever faithful, ever present and ever green.