

2nd Sunday of Advent B December 4, 2011 – Fr Haemmerle

Next weekend there will be the collection for Retired Religious in our country. In the past we would have a retired religious speak at the masses this weekend, but were unable to arrange that this year. There will be a collection at the doors next weekend, and traditionally St. Charles has always responded very generously. I believe the reason is that so many of us have such fond memories of our experiences with nuns and religious men, in grade school and high school. Eight Sisters of Charity taught me in grade school, many of them fine teachers, and all of them gave such wonderful witness of their love of God. Unfortunately they were paid very little, and now with aging communities, with fewer younger nuns to support them, many religious communities struggle to take care of them. We are asked to help those religious who helped us in so many ways.

Our readings today are most beautiful. Our first reading today is from the 40th chapter of Isaiah, really the first chapter of second Isaiah. It is written to a people who have lived in exile, and now are allowed to return to Jerusalem. And he calls out, "In the desert prepare the way of the lord." In the gospel we encounter John the Baptist, the prophet of Advent, and he gives the same message, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." The gospel then adds, he came "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

The second week of Advent does highlight the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This Monday evening we will have a Penance service at St. Charles at 7:00 pm. There will be many priests to hear confessions. On Saturday there will two penance services for our second graders and their families. There is no better way to prepare to receive the Christ Child on Christmas than to receive this sacrament, and yet it is the most neglected sacrament we have. Sometimes when a parent of a second grader comes to receive the sacrament, they say that they have not received the sacrament in many years, some since high school. I suspect that is why some hesitate, even fear to come. But that is no reason not to come for this sacrament. It is good for us to examine our consciences, to search our souls and to ask ourselves how our relationship with God is, how our relationship with our spouse or children is. It is good and it is humbling to confess our sins to another, to a priest and to God. It is assuring to know that God does forgive us, regardless of how much we have sinned. And I am convinced that we are better after receiving the sacrament. I encourage all of you to make the effort to get to confession.

John the Baptist, after Mary, is the most important character of Advent. John was well known, he is referred to more often than Jesus in writings by contemporaries outside of the New Testament. He came before Jesus, and had a large following. And yet when he saw Jesus come, he stepped aside, he pointed to Jesus and said, "He is the one, He is mightier than I am, I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals."

We are called to be like John the Baptist, to point to Jesus, to witness to our faith in Jesus. Today I could not help but notice how many parishioners came to church bearing gifts. Many brought beautifully wrapped presents that they placed under the giving tree, for those who have so much less, some brought food for the meals for St. Vincent hotel, some brought cookies for the live nativity this afternoon. No trumpets and whistles but a silent witness to their faith in Jesus. We point to Jesus by the lives we live.

Advent is a time for reconciliation, it is a time for giving, it is a time to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. It is a time to prepare the way of the lord.