

St. Mary of the Angels Sunday Advent IV B 12/24/17
II Samuel 7.1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Romans 16.25-27; Luke 1.26-38

My Brothers and Sisters,

Two notable events dominated the news this past week: 1) The death of Cardinal Law and 2) the signing into law the Republican Tax Bill.

The first looks to the past and concerns our church community.

The second looks to the future and concerns our civil community.

The first reminds us of the abuse of power in the sexual scandal of the past. The second points out to us the abuse of power in the economic scandal that is sure to unfold in the future.

The scandal of the past wounded thousands of children and cost the church billions of dollars. The scandal of the future will be evident with the wealthy 1 per cent predicted to reap 83 per cent of the benefits, and, ultimately, we will see their benefits paid for by the diminishment of universal health care, the undermining of CHIP, and a deprivation of funds for Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

If the scandal of the past was the exploitation of our vulnerable children, the scandal of the future will be the exploitation of our vulnerable elderly and poor.

As we stand on the threshold of this Christmas, where do we look for hope? Where will we find courage?

As always, we begin with God, and we begin with today's Scripture readings.

David thought that he was powerful and could do all things. He had conquered Israel's enemies, secured peace and now planned to build a house for God. God had to straighten out his thinking. "No, David, it is not about you. Turn and look at me. I was the one who took you from the pasture and made you commander. I have been with you wherever you went, and I have destroyed all your enemies." That was about the past. Then God promised the future: "I will make you famous... I will fix a place for my people ... I will give you rest from your enemies ... I will raise up an heir for you ... I will make his kingdom firm ... I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me." All that God promised, God has done, but not in the way that David and the people of Israel wanted and expected. There was no battle. There was no victory. There is no earthly kingdom.

Instead, as we see in the Gospel, God opened a new chapter in human history. The Israelites may have housed God in the Temple of Jerusalem and we may house God in magnificent churches and cathedrals, but God prefers the human heart for a dwelling place and chose a virgin's womb as its beginning. How can this be? Only through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, whose power is not the power of force, but the power of love.. And that Spirit is with us today, continually looking for a dwelling place and finding it wherever there is a heart open enough and humble enough to receive that Spirit.

This past week, while the Globe featured Cardinal Law's death and the Republican Tax Bill, it also told another story, the story of Darrell Jones, a man, convicted of murder 30 years ago, not because he committed the crime, but because he was black and the jury was white, and because the police evidence had been tampered with. Now, after thirty years in prison, he was finally freed. The article mentioned both the work of The New England Center for Investigative reporting, WBUR public radio, his attorney, Lisa Kavanaugh, and, especially, of my friend and colleague, Fr. Bill Barry, S.J, who believed Darrell, believed in Darrell, and faithfully stood by and for him over many, many years until this moment of freedom. And, now, it is Bill who has arranged a place for Darrell to stay and a place for him to work for the coming year. Here Christmas is taking place for here new life is being born.

What God asked of Mary was a heart open to receive his Holy Spirit. Mary said, "Yes," and new life began within her. Some time ago, God made a similar request of Bill. He said, "Yes," and now new life emerges from prison. God asks the same of us. God asks that we turn to Him and keep our hearts ready and open to receive his requests. As Carmelite spiritual writer, Wilfrid Stinissen, wrote: "If you live along with Mary, turned away from yourself and turned toward God, then even you will give life to the world. You get to give birth to Christ." So, in the Spirit of God is our hope, and, with the Spirit of God, comes our courage. As with Mary, we need only a heart that says, "Yes." God will do the rest and show us the way. Amen

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