

Liturgy and Social Justice

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

Advent liturgy is the link between today's world full of crises, human struggle and injustice, and tomorrow's world renewed in the Lord's total coming which brings into being "new heavens and a new earth." We look forward to the coming of Christ in glory to bring the fulfillment of his promise: to mend our brokenness, to heal our divisions, to break down the barriers that keep us apart.

The scriptural dimension of the Church's liturgical life during Advent concentrates on the prophets: messengers of God so intoxicated with his presence that they were compelled to speak out in challenge and hope; messengers so filled with the vision of the future that they would not allow themselves to be confined by the circumstances of the present.

The prophets' messages challenge us today to engage in committed social service to one another in response to the demands of the Gospel. Their voices must jog our consciences and move us to do more than donate a few cans of food and a few coins to a Christmas collection. Advent is not a season for one-shot goodwill. It is only a more intensive time for the work of social justice that should be going on in our parishes all year long.

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 1:26-38. (R1) 2 Sm. 7:1-5, 8-11, 16. (R2) Rom. 16:25-27.

A thousand years before the birth of Christ, King David told Nathan, the prophet, that he wanted to build a house for the Lord. The Lord, through Nathan, told David that He had things all wrong. It was the Lord who had done things for David, not the other way round. However, David's concern so touched the Lord that God promised to build a house for David that would have no end. (R1). The Gospel story of the annunciation is the fulfillment of that promise (R3).

No better preparation for Christmas can be made than to ponder prayerfully on this familiar, but dramatic, story. The persons of the drama are angelic and royal: an angel sent by God, Gabriel, and a virgin, Mary, betrothed to a scion of the House of David.

The angel said to her: "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter!" In the old translation, it was, "Hail, full of grace." The new one is more accurate. For "Hail" is a greeting. The angel was sent to give Mary more than a greeting. He was coming to announce the birth of the Messiah. Now in the prophets, especially Zephaniah, the coming of the Messiah was foretold as an event of great joy. So it was fitting that the angel's first words to Mary should be, not a salutation, like "Hail" but an invitation to joy, like "Rejoice!"

Secondly, "O highly favored daughter!" is a better translation than "full of grace." The latter expression puts the focus on Mary. Luke wanted the focus on God, for the Incarnation began with and was the work of God. All grace begins with God.

The angel came to tell Mary

INSIGHTS On Pastoral Liturgy

Any worship which does not ground itself in this work is hollow and empty ritualism; worship that does not foster new directions and depths to the community's service has not adequately proclaimed the paschal mystery as a living reality today. Likewise, any service which is not generously reflective of the boundless depths of the Father's love manifested in Jesus has no right to the name of "Christian."

But how might the prophetic Advent spirit be realized today? How do we answer the challenge? Here are three possibilities.

There will likely be a collection of canned goods and money in most parishes during this Season. But could the families of the parish fast for one day each month in 1976 and give the food they would have consumed to stock a year-round food shelf? Or, the fruits of the fast could be translated into money and donated to CARE or another agency who could bring food to the world's hungry. The parish family's sharing at the Eucharistic

what God intended to do. He was going to send His Son and, because He was, He favored her in a unique way: He filled her with His life and love from the moment of her conception (the Immaculate Conception). Thus, she was truly blessed among women; and the Lord was to be with her.

Mary's reaction to this message was fear. The angel allays her fears, then goes on to tell her that the promise God had made to David to build him a house (a dynasty) was now going to be fulfilled: she would bear a Son; his name was to be Jesus; He would inherit the throne of David; His reign was to be without end.

To Mary's "how" to all this, the angel answered that His birth would be miraculous, done by the Holy Spirit, who was operative when the world began and who would be operative again when Jesus would begin His public life (at His baptism) and when the Church would begin her public life (at Pentecost).

How beautiful Mary's obedience when she understood! She did not pray the way the world generally does: "Thy will be changed!" No, she said, "May his will for me be done."

How thankful we ought to be to Mary. For one moment the redemption of the world hinged on her consent. Do we not too often take her for granted? She could have said, No. Is it not common today for potential mothers to prevent life? Worse still, to destroy unborn life? Mary consented to be a life-giver, because she loved not only God but also each one of us. We owe her love and thanks.

St. Paul labored that Christ be formed in Christians. He was first formed through the Holy Spirit and Mary. He is still formed in those who have love and devotion to the Holy Spirit and Mary. For such as these, Christmas is truly Christmas. May it also be merry!

table would then be more authentic and truly reflective of the coming kingdom when all who are "without money will have bread to eat and milk to drink." (Isaiah 55:1)

Christmas is a time of exuberance, joy and celebration — qualities reflected in teenagers as well as pre-school children. We fret a great deal about the plight of youth in our world, and the fact that we don't see them at church anymore. The Jesus of "Superstar" and "Godspell" means more to them than the Sunday sermon simply because this is where they find exuberance and joy. Could we not make our parish buildings a welcome place for our teenagers, a year-round place to "Drop in" without being hassled or evangelized? Couldn't we just listen to them and respect them, allowing them space to relax, be themselves and be together? We might then find them returning to our liturgical celebrations and bringing with them the gifts of vitality and joy we so sorely miss.

The Advent-Christmas Season also brings many visits of church and community groups to the institutionalized elderly. This is good. Some no longer have families living or close by to visit them at so important a family time. However, must these people who have done so much to foster our life and growth wait for Christmas or Easter for a visit? Why not begin an all-year parish visitation program with the local nursing home or high-rise that would include not only eucharistic ministry but also regular visits with residents to read, write letters, or just plain visit with them. Then work toward a springtime communal anointing celebration with those more seriously sick and weak. The whole parish family will be richer for the experience.

What other possibilities exist to make the Advent liturgies of hope and promise a reality in our troubled and pain-filled world today? Only the limits of parish imagination will exhaust them. The needs are there; the Gospel challenge rings in our ears. Let us hasten the day when "faithfulness shall spring up from the earth, and justice will reach down from heaven." (Psalm 85)

Business In The Diocese

Martin F. Birmingham, president of Marine Midland Bank-Rochester, has been named chief executive officer and Rochester regional president for the Marine Midland system when the ten Marine Midland banks become one state-wide bank on Jan. 1. In both responsibilities he succeeds Frank E. Holley who will continue as chairman of the Rochester regional board. Birmingham joined the bank in 1954 as a mortgage loan officer. He became executive vice president in 1968 and president in 1973. Among his many civic responsibilities, he is chairman of the board of trustees of St. John Fisher College, president of the Rochester-Monroe County Convention and Visitors' Bureau, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Community Chest and St. Ann's Home.

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Christmas Presents

Bernie Bromka, center, grand knight of Pope Pius XII Council, K of C, dispenses charity on behalf of his colleagues after their Christmas dinner Dec. 6 in Christ the King parish hall. From the left are Brother Edward Connors, CFC, who accepted, a tuition scholarship for Bishop Kearney High School; Father David Mura, standing in for the pastor, Father William Schiffrli; Michael Groden of the Courier-Journal, who was given \$100 for the newspaper's Christmas Fund, and the Rev. Mr. Thomas Valenti, who received a check to help a Becket Hall seminarian and another for needy young people making Teen Seminar retreats.

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