

HOMILY ADVENT SUNDAY 4-B

“Be a Beacon of Hope and a Light to the World”

(2 Samuel 7:1-5b, 8b-12. 14a, 16; Psalm 89; Romans 16:225-27; Luke 1:26-38)

Years ago, noted television personality and writer Malcome Muggeridge spent some time working with Mr. Theresa in the slums of Calcutta. He noted that one of the forces that kept her going was her all-consuming desire to “Do something beautiful for God.”

Today, we are encouraged to let God do something beautiful in us – to fill us with faith and hope for the world.

In the first reading, King David sounds like Mr. Theresa. He is now a successful king. There is more peace and stability in his kingdom, and he wants to do something great. He wants to build a temple for God. The prophet Nathan quickly sets him straight. It is God who has plans for him, who will surprise him, make him a great nation in a mysterious way. God will provide for him an offspring who will be son of God and who will establish David’s throne forever.

The second reading takes us further along this same line. St. Paul talks of a mystery kept secret for ages now revealed through Jesus Christ, that all might believe in him and receive eternal life and light.

And in the gospel we see it happening. Two poor, unknown, simple country women, Mary and Elizabeth, are quietly, without fanfare, touched by God’s spirit. They conceive within the darkness of their wombs two children who are Jesus and John the Baptist. Those two children changed the course of human history, indeed the history of the universe and all of creation. The Creator has now come to live among us, more, *to live within us*, and to love us totally as light in the darkness of the world.

There is darkness in our communities, our country and our world. Even a moment of reflection brings up things like a rate of suicide among the First Nations 5 times the national average; family break-ups; neglected kids; addictions of all kinds; marriages failing; graft, misuse of public funds, dishonesty and corruption at all levels of government. Quebec is still trying to separate and there are cutbacks of social services. The profit motive and greed reigning supreme in unbridled, unregulated capitalism has brought about the most serious economic mess the world has ever seen. We have a First Nations social situation called a ticking time bomb in the Royal Commission Report; the gap between the rich and the poor growing wider daily; war in too many countries, and on and on.

1,000 years ago, at the last millennium, history shows that people had five major fears: poverty, invasion, epidemics, violence, and death. Has anything changed? People and governments today also fear renewed poverty, invasion by immigrants, the epidemic of Aids and new drug resistant diseases (even a pandemic), horizontal and family violence, and death. Disintegration of family; fundamentalism; polarization; addictions and globalization are characteristics of the darkness in our society today.

Are we to despair? Not one who has faith. For the person of faith in Jesus Christ, there is every reason to hope. Hope is the main thrust of the pastoral letter Pope JP II wrote to the church five years ago on the millennium.

What happened so quietly and mysteriously 2,000 years ago in Mary and Elizabeth continues to happen in those who believe. Faith makes all the difference, the faith of Mary who is an example of what Paul calls the “obedience of faith” that we are called to. Faith leads to hope, and hope leads to love.

As all the darkness in the world cannot overpower a single candle so all the darkness in the world cannot overpower those with faith. Through strong faith in Jesus Christ who is the light to the world, we become, each in our own way, light to the world around us, giving others hope and showing the way of quiet, powerful, healing love that makes present the kingdom of God which Jesus established in our world for all time. We believe that love has come to live within us. We are now the Temple of God, of the Holy Spirit of Jesus. We have every reason to hope.

My Coat of Arms is my way of trying to help us all realize this gospel. At the bottom is my motto, *Regnum Dei Intra Vos*, The Kingdom of God is among you, taken from Luke 17:21. The Catholic wheel of life just above it symbolizes the dynamic process of our faith that involves *Raema, Kononia, Liturgia and Diakonia*. The Word of God (the bible) gathers us into community (the circle). We then celebrate who we are (the candle) and are sent out to serve all others in love (the symbol of Mary, the first disciple). It all leads to the essence of Christian life, which is loving service to the most needy – the heart of today’s gospel and the heart of our faith.

There are signs and glimmers of that light and hope all around: people on healing journeys; communities who are healing and confronting their abusers; people who are learning to communicate and forgive; more and more lay ministry. *Returning To Spirit* is one such sign of hope. Developed by an Algonquin facilitator with the help of a sister of St. Anne, it puts First Nations and Euro-Canadian participants through separate weeklong healing and personal growth sessions then brings the two groups together for three days of dialogue and reconciliation.

Here is what Father John D Matheson, part of a “Friends on the Outside” group from Regina, SK, had to say about his experience of the workshop. “The workshop has been a magnificent testimony to communal discernment: a newly-formed community discovering our blocks to reconciliation, and practical exercises to remove these blocks. Any community could profit from *Returning to Spirit*, both from the practical wisdom and the spirit of attentive, joyful reconciliation! Bless those who designed the program!

Little by little, God’s spirit is at work in our lives and in our darkness, through faith in Jesus Christ, bringing hope and new life and light to our poor, suffering, unbelieving world. We are part of it for we are the Church, the Body of Christ.

The Eucharist we celebrate is our anchor, our foundation. In it we confess our need for forgiveness, proclaim God’s Word, profess our faith, and receive the Body of Christ so that we might become more and more like Christ, who is the light to the world.

So, have faith, and let Christ make you a light to the world and a beacon of hope and love that will overcome all the darkness. Let your light shine