

2nd Sunday of Advent

Last month our staff attended a day of prayer with other parish staff members from around the diocese. Near the end of the day, Father Charles Rowe introduced our bishop, James Johnston, and announced that he had been with us now for one full year. The applause in the room was long and sincere, thanking God for a shepherd who could unify and guide our local church. We all yearn for good leaders. You may be dissatisfied with the leadership you get at work, at school, from businesses, from your parish or even in your own home. We often complain about our leaders, and we thank God when we get a good one.

At the time of Isaiah the prophet, the people of Israel were going through a leadership crisis. They all remembered King David, the son of Jesse, who had served them in the past. David symbolized all that a leader could be, like Abraham Lincoln in this country. But David had died 250 years before Isaiah was born, and his successors had divided the country and subjected it to invasions, capture and destruction. The legacy of David was like the stump of a tree. Where once a glorious tree stood tall and strong, now there remained only a faint reminder of its greatness. Isaiah promised the people a better future. He wrote, “a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him.” We Christians believe that Isaiah is prophesying the coming of Jesus from the line of David, the coming we commemorate each year at Advent. Isaiah prophesies that this leader will come with certain gifts: wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord. If those sound familiar to you, it’s because they evolved in Christian tradition as the gifts of the Holy Spirit that come to each of us through the sacrament of confirmation. Now think about this: Isaiah told the people that a great leader would be coming to them, a leader like David, and he would come with particular gifts. We believe that Jesus fulfilled that prophecy, and that those same gifts have been poured into our hearts through confirmation. We receive those gifts with the same purpose: to be good leaders, to help guide others and inspire them by our good judgment, strength and faith. If you are hoping and praying for a good leader in your life, you should first look inside, because God expects you to be a good leader for your family, your school, your church, and your place of work.

Usually in our church priests and deacons baptize infants, and a bishop later confirms them. We receive confirmation only once. Its gifts last a lifetime. If you wish to be a godparent, the Catholic Church requires you to be confirmed. Some parishes never check on this, but we do. If you have never been confirmed, we can help you prepare for it. If you are living as a couple but do not have a marriage in the church, we first have to complete your marriage in the church, and then you are eligible for confirmation. At St. Anthony’s we can help you with all of that.

Isaiah prophesied that a great leader would come one day, possessing the gifts of the Spirit. He foresaw Jesus Christ, who shares those gifts with us. During Advent we wait for the coming of Christ. If you are waiting for a good leader in your life, you may not have to look too far. That leader is here. That leader is Christ. That leader is you.

Sunday, December 4, 2016