

Third Sunday of Advent

This past week Bishop Johnston issued a letter to the faithful of the diocese expressing concern for refugees around the world, and especially for Dreamers, the young people brought into our country as minors. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops declared this past Tuesday, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Day of Solidarity with Immigrants, and Bishop Johnston has declared Holy Family Sunday at the end of this month “a day of special prayer for the enactment of just legislation [that] upholds the rights of Dreamers.” The bishop writes, “As of March 5, 2018, this class of people will no longer enjoy the safeguards offered by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.... While our nation has both the right and duty to foster its security through prudent immigration laws, we must not attempt to purchase safety at the cost of violating the fundamental dignity of our fellow men and women.”

Bishop Johnston enumerates these motives for migration: “religious persecution, armed conflict, economic collapse, environmental catastrophes, and other disasters caused by nature or contrived” by human beings. Many migrants crossed our borders legally, but overstayed a visa. The Dreamers are living in the only country they’ve ever known, attend schools, get jobs, protect our nation and worship in our churches. In truth, some people migrate for less noble purposes - to avoid prosecution for crimes, or to profit from illicit opportunities that sadly abound in our nation. Some immigrants are perpetrators, but others are victims.

At times each of us perpetrates sin: We have not applied ourselves in school, we hung out with the wrong people, we sought personal advantage rather than that of the needy. Sometimes our legal problems, broken relationships, lost jobs or ill health are our own fault. But other times they are not. Sometimes we are just victims of a world where things have gone wrong in spite of our best efforts.

We each alternate as perpetrator and victim, and the difference is one way to contrast two seasons of the Church year: Lent and Advent. During Lent we encounter our own sins and spend weeks repenting from the wrongs we have done. During Advent we behold a broken world we did not invent, where injustices abound, the hungry are not fed, the mighty do not care for others, and the lowly remain lowly. So we say to God, “This mess is not our doing. Would you please send us a savior?”

After today’s first reading our cantor sang, God “has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy.” Normally we join in a responsorial psalm, but today’s responsorial comes from a different book of the bible: Luke’s Gospel; it is the hymn of praise that Mary sang upon greeting her cousin Elizabeth. The refrain actually comes out of our first reading from Isaiah, and it foreshadows Mary’s Magnificat: “My soul rejoices in my God.”

During Advent we are all refugees, seeking salvation in a world we did not break. A friend or spouse may have walked away against your will. You may have bad news about your health. You may have a lousy grade for the semester in spite of hard work. But no matter your lowliness, you have reason to rejoice. The same God who sent a savior into the womb of a virgin is sending Christ into you.

Sunday, December 17, 2017