

## 3rd Sunday of Advent

Immigration was the topic of discussion at meetings this week at the Catholic Center with its offices of hispanic ministry and human rights. We heard about the fears of immigrant families with a new US president, and our staff hoped to find resources such as labor lawyers for immigrants, and ways to help refugee families in our neighborhood. In a separate meeting, a representative of JVS helped me understand the plight of some of our African refugees. Many of them suffered ethnic violence in their homeland, so the United Nations resettled them in other places, such as Tanzania. Some of the refugee camps in Africa are becoming large, and the host countries have appealed to the UN for another solution. Some refugees then moved to other countries, such as the United States. Organizations that help resettle them include Catholic Charities, Della C. Lamb and JVS. Last week members of a social organization, the Alliance Française, came to St. Anthony's to meet some of our refugees who speak French. They are raising funds to provide a merrier Christmas. Even some of our hispanic families who are called immigrants, could be called refugees because they have fled violence at home in order to find a more hospitable environment. St. Anthony Parish has become home to refugees and immigrants from Mexico, Central America, South America, Haiti, Vietnam, South Sudan, Chad, Congo, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic. I don't think there's another parish in the diocese where refugee families from so many nations have found one church to call home. Three different language groups come to our daily mass at 8 am, and everyone somehow gets along. The eucharist holds us together in ways that language cannot. One of the priests who used to work here once said to me, "God is doing something wonderful in parishes like St. Anthony's."

The prophet Isaiah is a central figure of Advent. We hear more from him during these four weeks than from any other Old Testament prophet. He was dealing with people who were not refugees, but prisoners of war. They left their homeland because they had been kidnapped amid violence. They wanted to go home, but they could not see how. Isaiah prophesied that life would get better than they could imagine. They would go home, and, he says, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing." They will go back home singing. Furthermore, God will also restore their land. Where there is desert, there will be flowers. This prophecy must have seemed too good to be true. But it came to pass. The people returned home, and their crops were abundant. We hear this passage on the Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday - the Sunday of rejoicing. Christmas is coming. As Isaiah says, "Here is your God; he comes."

We all go through times when we feel that we are living in a desert, that our hands have grown feeble, our knees weak, our hearts frightened. But we have also seen the glory of God in ways we never imagined. We overcame a sickness or an injury. We restored a lost friendship. We returned to Church. In the past, good news has made us rejoice and sing for joy. For many of the families in our neighborhood, the good news is right here at St. Anthony's. Because you have welcomed the stranger, helped the needy, and worshiped as one, you have shown here in our midst the fulfillment of the prophecy: Our God is coming to save.

Sunday, December 11, 2016