

## Second Sunday of Advent

**Kansas City's murder rate is horrifically high this year. It's troubling to think we cannot stem the tide of violence in our own city. I don't pretend to have the answer, but I do feel that each of us needs to contribute to peaceful co-existence, even to love. We each have differences with other people, but differences need not divide. The cycle of urban gun violence is spiraling out of control, but I refuse to give up hope. I believe that God created us in ways that enable us foster mutual respect. Any of us may have heartfelt differences with members of our family, neighbors and strangers. But those differences give no license for hatred or violence on the streets or at home. We do not have to agree, but we can avoid disrespectful words and practice civil discourse.**

**The problems that result from strong emotions in close quarters are not new. Saint Paul experienced something similar, as we can tell from his Letter to the Romans. He was trying to help a young Christian community through a dilemma they had not foreseen: Both Jews and Gentiles were believing in Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles were worshipping together, eating and socializing together. That may sound beautiful, but it did not go smoothly. Paul has to remind them to treat one another respectfully. He writes, "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you." This is how Paul prays for them: May God "grant you to think in harmony with one another... that with one accord you may with one voice glorify" God. Hammering home this theme of unity, Paul seems to address a situation of disunity. People who had disagreed with one another for generations suddenly found themselves inside the same group. They struggled to overcome past prejudices. We find the same thing today: People with differences find themselves in the same family, workplace, school and church. They come together because they hold something important in common, but their differences on other matters threaten to pull them apart.**

**In his letter Paul throws the Romans a lifeline they should have seen and that many of us don't consult often enough: the sacred scriptures. Paul says, "Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction." The prophets did not simply write for their own people; they wrote for us who would take up their writings centuries later and see how God was preparing long ago for the coming of Christ. Paul says that Christ came among the Jews "to show God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises of the patriarchs," and to the Gentiles that they "might glorify God for his mercy." As God had promised Abraham and Moses and David a day of justice for all, so we believe that day came with the birth of Jesus Christ.**

**On every Sunday of Advent the lectionary gives us a first reading drawn from the prophets, especially Isaiah, to show these very points: What was written previously was written for our instruction, and that God confirmed the promises of the past. Believing that God fulfilled the promises to our ancestors helps us hope that God will fulfill the ones made to us.**

**If you find yourself among people with whom you should get along, don't consider violence, consider Paul's lifeline: the sacred scriptures of Advent. Read the prophets. They guide us through this season to show that God fulfills promises. That will bring us together in hope.**

Sunday, December 8, 2019