

JMJ CHS

11-28-21 First Sunday of Advent

I'm carrying my stick today, not because I have sore knees, and it has nothing to do with my being your shepherd. I'm simply using it as a walking stick in honor of Saint Joseph. This year dedicated to him is soon coming to an end. He was the head of the Holy family. And I'll bet he had a Walking stick just like this one, as he guided Mary and a humble donkey on their trek southward. Joseph was 33 years old, and had actually been living in Jerusalem. Mary was 15. Both had committed to a life of celibacy. And yet they found themselves in an "arranged" marriage, and playing central roles in salvation history.

Today, then, we start out on our annual pilgrimage in solidarity with Joseph, Mary and Jesus, inside his mommy, as they begin their historic journey to Bethlehem. So, right now, at the very beginning, let's light candle number one on our Advent wreath as we leave Nazareth on our way to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. Their journey took about four days. Ours will take four weeks and these candles will mark our progress.

Homily.

Wow, strong words from Jesus about a day to come. A day that will *assault* everyone on the face of the earth. Will that be the "Illumination of Conscience" day that we've been talking about lately?

Before I get into my homily, I just wanted to say a few more words about Joseph. You noticed how I spoke kind of authoritatively about how old he was and how old Mary was. And the other details. This is not information that we can find in the Bible, but there are other sources that have influenced the thinking of the Church throughout the years. I have one of them here. Recently, one of our parishioners gave me this book. This is actually an abridged edition. The original came in four volumes over 2,700 pages. The author was venerable Mary of Agreda, a holy mystic from Spain in the 1600s. It's called *The Mystical City of God*, and it's an auto-biography of Mary, dictated by her, to this Holy woman.

There have been many writings like this down through the ages. It's called *private revelation* and the Church says that we don't have to believe these things if we don't want to. So, sometimes it helps if we have an authoritative person, a mentor, that we can go to for some encouragement, one way or another, as to whether or not these words can be trusted. Are they reliable?

Well, I can say this. A very big fan of this book was none other than Blessed Father Solanus Casey. He was a skeptic at first, but it became his second most popular book after the Bible.

Last week I got this magazine in the mail and there on the cover was a headline that said. **The End of Ordinary Time**. At first glance I thought it was just a timely statement of the fact that we are leaving one liturgical season and entering into the next. Ordinary time, Advent time.

But I almost immediately recognized that there just might be a double meaning here. To say it another way, with a slightly different emphasis, "The End of Ordinary Time". Nothing is "ordinary" anymore. There is a new normal out there that really is not very normal at all. This suspicion was confirmed in the secondary headline that said: "*nothing will change the Church more profoundly than...climate change.*" Well, ok. Whatever. But if I was the one writing the article, I might have taken a different approach. I mean, global warming, I'm sure, is a very

important concern, but could there possibly be anything more profoundly relevant than a rise in temperature? Like what would it profit a man if he gained the whole world . . . . .but in the end . . . . .lost his own soul? That's what my profound concern is for the Church and the world, and I thought that I would talk a little bit about it here. . . . . at the end of Ordinary Time, and the beginning of Advent.

Advent is called a season of preparation for Christmas, and the Church always provides us with suggestions as to what we might do personally to prepare ourselves for the Coming of the Christ. I wrote about some of those in today's bulletin. But the one that I would like to emphasize here today, that thing of profound importance, is repentance. From the word repent.

The very first words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, as he began his ministry was, "Repent, and believe in the good news." The message of St. John the Baptist, at the River Jordan, in the desert, was "Repent", and his baptism was called a *baptism of repentance*. The very first words of St. Peter to the crowds, on Pentecost Sunday, was "Repent, and be baptized!"

So it's repentance. But did you notice that I didn't say confession? Yes, confession is the sacrament by which we confess our sins, but confession and repentance, while connected, are really two different things.

We will provide several communal penance services here in Livingston Vicariate to make it as convenient as possible to confess your sins. And, the greater number of those people will be doing it simply as part of their own personal tradition within the Church. They like to go to confession twice a year. In Advent and in Lent. They may have no major sins, just the little peccadilloes that we all fall into from time to time. And so they come and they wipe the slate clean for Christmas.

Then there are those individuals who will say, "Father, I may have confessed this before but. . . . .". I told them that they were forgiven. Period. Don't confess them anymore. Jesus got it right the first time.

On the other hand, maybe there is some thread going through our lives that well, we suppress from our memory, our consciousness, and so we don't confess it. It's too painful to even consider. Or, maybe still, we are all too conscious of it. And we just are too embarrassed to mention it to a priest.

Or, even worse, we don't want to let go of the sin. I would bet that pornography or some other sexually related sin might fit here. Or maybe an unwillingness to forgive someone who has hurt you. Or an unwillingness to stop gossiping. It feels so good to be able to share with others.

In any case, there is the need for repentance. Repentance means a change. A reversal of one's lifestyle. Or at least a portion of their lifestyle. A return to the holy path, The reconciliation with God. An opening of oneself to the restoration of a relationship with God, and the receiving of his sanctifying grace.

I'd like to tell you a story that will help make my point. I told you about it a few weeks ago and maybe some of you actually looked it up. You can find it on our parish website. It's the story of Nolan Ostrowski. He's a husband, a father and a construction worker. He is a member of St. Peter's Parish in Eaton Rapids. Well, last summer he got Covid and he got it bad. Things were not looking too good for Nolan. People were praying for him and on the feast day of Fr. Solanus, somebody visited the shrine in Detroit and made some special prayers. Well, as Nolan relates to the story, there in his hospital room, he awakened to sense that there was somebody seated next

to him in a chair. He couldn't see his face but he had a sense it was a holy person. Perhaps his guardian angel. He couldn't tell. Because he just saw his robe and his hands.

Soon thereafter, that same mysterious person appeared again – this time at the foot of his bed. And this time, he recognized that this must be a saint. He had heard about Fr. Solanus but really didn't know too much about him. And this is how he describes that second encounter. Recognizing the seriousness of his condition he began to plead with the Saint. "I want to live. My wife and my children need me. And I need them. I love them and I don't want to leave them. I want to watch my kids grow up. What will you do for me? Will you help me?"

Well, as Nolan describes it, Fr. Solanus just kind of sat there and stared at him. He actually seemed bored, kinda annoyed to be there. And he wouldn't even look Nolan in the eye. Kind of mysterious. All of us who know Fr. Solanus recognize that he was gracious, humble, loving and kind. So to hear of him described this way was a bit disconcerting. Well, maybe it was a nudge by the Holy Spirit, but Nolan added one little piece of information. "And if I get healed I will no longer take the name of the Lord in vain." Maybe as a construction worker he did that kind of thing regularly. Well, at that point, Blessed Solanus suddenly came to life. He jumped up out of his chair and floated around to the side of the bed where he touched Nolan's rib cage and began the process that would lead to Nolan's miraculous recovery from Covid.

I guess the implication of all of this was that while Nolan Ostrowski was a good Catholic man, he needed to repent of something that God, and heaven, and apparently Fr. Solonus, thought was very important. Taking the name of the Lord in vain, after all, is a violation of one of the 10 Commandments.

Maybe each of us has something in our life like Nolan had in his life that we need to identify and repent of. May I suggest that we invoke the Holy Spirit to "advocate" on our behalf and to shine it's light into the deep recesses of our spirit and *illuminate our conscience*, so that we might work up our courage, step up to the plate this Advent season to confess our sins, and more importantly, to repent of anything that hinders our relationship with God.

*Brothers and sisters:*

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love  
for one another and for all,  
just as we have for you,  
so as to strengthen your hearts,  
to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father  
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.

Joseph's year will come to an end on the solemnity of Mary's Immaculate Conception on December 8. I think it would be a good idea to do a novena leading up to that date. That would begin on Tuesday. The St. Andrew Christmas novena also starts on that day.

~Fr. John