

## Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

12-19-2021

Many of us were able to participate in *The Chosen Christmas Special* last Sunday in the Activity Center. In the Christmas Special, we were perhaps too anxious to get to the birth of Christ. The music was fantastic. It was a good reminder that we should enjoy the journey to Christ. Sometimes we get distracted and even ignore that Jesus is coming into our lives in a special way in just a few days. And sometimes we even lose our focus that He comes into us in a special way at Communion.

In the *The Chosen Christmas Special*, Joseph and Mary attempt to stay at one inn and, apparently, the innkeeper does not have room because he can let the rooms to travelers with more money. The innkeeper and his wife are not all bad and present swaddling cloths, the cloth that is used to wrap a sacrificial lamb, and a suggestion to camp out in the stable. This innkeeper is not really mean, but offers only limited assistance. He is lukewarm. He will help as long as it does not cost money or effort.

I prefer the story of Joseph and Mary's search for an inn in the movie "*The Bells of St. Mary*". As the kids practice their Christmas pageant, Joseph and Mary go from inn to inn, being rejected at every stop. But why? Have you ever thought about how we prepare for Christmas? Christmas comes in less than a week and we are all frantically preparing; cooking, baking, last minute shopping. Are we going to be shut down by COVID? It is easy to become tired, exhausted and a little edgy with your family. Is this holiday over yet? Do we really have to go to your aunt's on those treacherous roads?

Those kids in the Christmas pageant from *The Bells of St. Mary* were in one sense just reading their lines, but in another sense they represent each of us. They represent all the distractions tugging on us. Maybe we attempt to pay some attention to Christ coming into our lives. But maybe at the end of the day we say I should have prayed more. Or maybe we aspire to do more the next day. Or we are frustrated because we got a little short with the kids. Or did we do anything for the poor? In today's Gospel, as soon as Mary finds out she is pregnant and that Elizabeth was pregnant, before she straightens things out with Joseph, she rushes to help her cousin. Do we put other people's needs above our business and fear?

It is so easy to focus on the superficial and not the substance. Remember Martha Stewart? She was known for the perfect holiday recipes, the perfect tree, the perfect cookware etc., etc. In the midst of all her fame, she was divorced and estranged from her children. Is this what Christmas is about? Is it about wreaths or relationships?

Like the innkeeper in *The Chosen*, like the kids in *The Bells of St. Mary* we have a tendency to give baby Jesus what is left over, if anything.

In the time we have until Christmas, in fact for the rest of our lives, let us change our focus and learn from Jesus. Christ came into the world in the most humble of circumstances. He was born in a stable filled with animals and smells and straw and well, you know what animal droppings are. He came in this most humble way to show us that no matter how our heart is

scarred by sin and hurt by betrayal, He will still take our hearts as His home if we but make room for Him.

So how do we clean up our hearts and make a place for Jesus to come into our lives? First of all, we need to respond to the humility that Jesus witnessed by being born in a stable to a poor family. We must first realize that we are not worthy of His love and His mercy. He does not expect us to be perfect. He does not expect us to earn His love. He does not expect us to sacrifice to receive His mercy. We have to humbly realize we are not in charge and joyfully accept the gift of His love.

Some of us feel a lifetime of bitter disappointment. Personal betrayal and slights have made us hard hearted. In *The Chosen*, they show what was probably the type of manger that Jesus was laid in. It is a stone trough. It must have been very hard and cold on that early December morn. Mary would have used the swaddling cloth, straw, a blanket and no doubt a motherly hug to warm the new baby, the new King. Sometimes there is a hardness in our heart that we can not easily strip away. But if we recognize that our hearts are scarred and that we need the balm of his love and forgiveness to create an appropriate home for the Lord, that is a start. Showing charity to others increases that balm, that flow of grace.

*The Chosen* has a great deal of extra-biblical dialogue. We Catholics call this *lectio divina*. What would Mary and Joseph have talked about as they awaited the birth of the Lord? Would they be anxious? I would. Would they be trying to imagine what it would be like? I would, wouldn't you? Eventually, they decide to trust, to be not afraid. Faith is necessary to make a home for Jesus. We need humility, love and faith.

As an innkeeper of our heart, we should learn from those innkeepers in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. Too busy, too consumed with money, too important, too much in control ... they missed the opportunity to have the King of the Universe born in their inn. Perhaps that fits in God's plan. He did not make these innkeepers hardhearted, but he used their rejection, the hardness of their hearts, to show us His humility and vulnerability. He would, and as we will see leading up to Holy Week, will endure anything if we but turn to Him in love. If we use our free will to say, "Yes, Lord, I need you".

Is there any better gift we can prepare for Him as we move towards Christmas than to prepare our hearts to receive Him? Is there any better gift we can give ourselves and our family as we move towards Christmas than to make room for Him?

Have a blessed and joy-filled Christmas!

**~Dcn. Jerry**