



Liturgical Seasoning

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

www.StAngelaBreaChurch.org

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS 2011

STEWARDSHIP ~ A Way of Life at St. Angela Merici Church

Advent ~ Season for Change & Stewardship

*A voice cries out in the wilderness,
prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight a highway for God.
Isaiah 40:3*

We know from years past that the word *Advent* means *coming* and that this liturgical season celebrates the 3-fold *coming* of the Lord ~ anticipation of the birthday of our Lord and His final coming to judge the living and the dead, as well as His continual coming into our hearts every day. There's no doubt about it ~ our God is here!

This Advent, however, instead of focusing on a particular emphasis or ritual action to drive home the *reason for the Season*, we immerse ourselves in the rest of the revisions of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal and our stewardship goals. Our last edition of *Musical Notes* illuminated the reasons for the Missal revisions while also profiling Tony Alonso, the composer of the *Mass of Joy & Peace*, the sung Mass parts we introduced in October. The rest of the revisions will begin, or *come*, the first weekend of Advent. We are fortunate to have the Audio-Visual Ministry who will continue to help to facilitate the transition from the old Missal to the new one via our screens. And the Music Ministry will continue to support us in singing and reciting the new Mass parts as well.

While learning the new responses, please be patient with our celebrants, for they have revisions to their portions of the Eucharist as well. This is a time to support your entire parish by participating fully in the Mass, as all of us are called to do. You know from experience, that when you're injured or ill, your performance of any activity is compromised. The same is true at Mass. When you hold back, you hold back the entire Body of Christ too. The

new revisions give each and every one of us a chance to examine how well we participate in Mass. Check your egos, fears, and desires to be cool at the door and be a full, participating member of the Body of Christ.

You will notice a theme in the readings leading into and within the Season of Advent: Stay awake, be ready, *prepare the way of the Lord*. While we are being urged by prophets from both the Old and New Testaments to prepare for the coming of our Lord in His birth and His final coming, it also means to prepare the way of the Lord each day in your hearts and minds. You can do this many ways, including the following.



First, prepare yourself for each Eucharistic. The liturgy is literally *the work of the people*, both in preparation and in participation. Pope John Paul II said that Mass is "heaven on earth". Not only do we get a glimpse of heaven but we celebrate Mass in Communion with the whole of the Body of Christ ~ the angels, the saints in heaven, those who have died, and God. This is why the Church calls us to full, active and conscious participation at every Eucharist we attend. Think about that for a bit and consider whether you treat the experience of Mass in the same spirit.

The new editions of *Today's Missal* will be on the racks the first weekend of Advent. You may want to take one home for you and your family to examine and even rehearse all the new responses and prayers. Also, read the scriptures readings before each Eucharist so you are familiar with the Word. But please be considerate towards the rest of the community and bring the missals back each time you come to Mass instead of grabbing a new one thereby depleting our supply, preventing other parishioners and guests from using them.

Second, prepare yourself to receive the Lord in your daily lives, making time each day to spend with the Lord. The scriptures say to pray unceasingly. Ponder how you might do this in your busy life. Fr. Michael gave us several suggestions at the November 5th Eucharist, basically stating that when you consider the safety, needs, and/or desires of others throughout your day, you are actively

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Gift of Love

Glory be, Lord, to Thee, God of My Salvation

*Gift of love, dawning bright, pierces through endless night:
God of life, sharing might, all creation holding, earth and sky enfolding.*

*Thus he spoke from on high: choose to live or to die,
love to give or deny ~ life and love now blending; love is life unending.*

*Then he came on the earth, Gift of Love from his birth;
shared our life, gave us worth; to himself inviting, God with us uniting.*

*For our sake was he killed; once foretold now fulfilled;
love so great, be not stilled! Beams of love he lifted, and with life was gifted.*

Gift of Love ~ Glory be, Lord, to Thee, God of our salvation.

For me, the Seasons of Advent and Christmas always herald the dark and cold season of winter. I am often extremely depressed during these times. Of course, part of the problem is that I've had Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) most of my life and my body does not do well in cold weather. TV commercials make FMS seem so simple to treat, but it is so much more difficult than just taking a pill. First of all, if you find a medication that you can actually tolerate and still lead a functional life, then you usually develop a tolerance to it and have to search for a new regimen. FMS isn't just a case of unexplained, wide-spread pain and exhaustion that tends to keep one's immune system low. It also mimics different conditions and diseases along with causing various forms of neuropathy (strange and bothersome sensations and sensitivities) that can literally drive you crazy at times.

Throughout the my life, and even to the present time, doctors have told me many *fibs* because they didn't want to tell me they hadn't a clue what was wrong with me; and, some simply didn't believe that I was ill. Some have literally laughed at me, while others have scoffed at my symptoms. Some even refused to treat my acute infections when I'd begin to have too many of them in one year, as if there was a magic quota on such things. However, just a few years ago, I found a primary physician who understands chronic medical problems. He works closely with me to try treat both acute and chronic ailments.

The last few years I have been dealing with a major heartbreak. It has shaken my faith and caused me major distress. I feel like a major part of who I thought I was is dying. Because of my chronic problems, I've had a rough and rocky road throughout my

life. Like some young adults, I left the Church because I found no comfort there. Then, I slowly came back because the world had nothing to offer me. I became involved in several ministries and that is what has continued to save me. They facilitate ways for me to explore my faith, share my story, and further develop and use my God-given gifts and talents. It's quite amazing how God uses people, even the ones we least expect, to teach and guide us. I could finally see how God was and continues to work in my life to break through each preconception and/or assumption that holds me back from being a healthy member of the Body of Christ. Well, I am still far from being where I should be, but each day I am *further along the road less traveled*. As I learn, I write, and share my experiences and inspirations with others. During my more recent misfortunes, Fr. Michael has been gracious enough to put me to work in various areas so that I may realize that I still am a desired member of our community here at St. Angela Merici. My close friends and family continue to support me, illustrating to me that God has blessed me far more than my problems have cursed me.

Recalling the words to *Gift of Love* last week reminded me how the Christ is the *Gift of Love* from our Father. While I feel that I am swimming through an *endless night* of depression and grief, I still see beams of Light *piercing* that ominous, cold darkness that engulfs me. While I feel parts of my life dying, I look to my God of Life. Sometimes, we have to let go of certain things so that God can guide us toward what He has ready for us. We have to allow Him to rip out those stained and damaged threads that were woven into the fabric of our lives so that beautiful

The Advent Of Our Lord ~ A New Season of Changes Continued from p.1

worshipping the Lord. How else can you pray unceasingly?

Our God is here, but where is he in your hustle and bustle through the busy holiday season? Christ was placed into a manger after his humble birth in the stable. Mary and Joseph probably did not busy themselves preparing for visitors. They welcomed them with awe and wonder while adoring their newborn baby boy, *Gift of Love from his birth**. A manger is literally a receptacle used to feed animals. What keeps you from spending more time in the manger with Christ, welcoming and feeding others in need of mercy, encouragement, companionship, guidance, or providing much needed meals, clothes, and/or shelter? As sheep, we feed from the manger when we consume our Lord Jesus at Eucharist and then it is our calling to fill the manger with ourselves becoming bread for the world.

Third, the Season of Advent is still about preparing for the final coming of the Lord. Would you be ready if Christ were to arrive on your doorstep today? Or, would you be caught unprepared like the foolish virgins who failed to prepare their lamps for the wedding feast and were locked outside when the bridegroom arrived? Now



design he had planned can once again begin to emerge. This is usually a painful and arduous process, but the Lord *shares his might* with us, strengthening us. He says that he will never give us more than we can handle. I must trust in that promise.

I love to be around nature. When I sit and journal at one of our local ponds or go hiking in the hills, I feel the *earth and sky enfold* around me, as the Lord's arms caress me through the gentle breeze or the warm sun on my skin along with all of nature scampering and fluttering about me. I feel God's presence when I am spending time with my canine friends too. They help me be a better human being, teaching me patience and to appreciate those who care about me.

God is constantly asking us to *choose* between His Way or that of the world. He gives us free will because he doesn't want a bunch of slaves or robots. There's so much power in choosing ~ so much so that some of us are sometimes hesitant about choosing anything. His Way leads to life while the world's way leads to death. *Choosing God* means we choose the life He wants for us. When I am frustrated, I could choose to give up on God, as I tried to do in college. Or, I can recognize that God never promised me an

is the time to examine that which keeps your lamps only half full or running on empty.

We are the Church, members of the Mystical Body of Christ, with our Lord as our Head. The Seasons of Advent and Christmas reminds us of this. They also remind us that we are to prepare the way of the Lord. We all have our gifts, which we can either hoard, spend frivolously, or share with everyone around us. As a stewardship parish, we know that we aren't to give out of obligation or to earn salvation ~ we give because we are saved and we are a community who shares all that God continues to give us. We believe the Lord will provide for all our needs and, in that, we are the provisions for others. So, take time this Advent and Christmas to prepare your minds, hearts and souls to receive and be Christ, letting His Spirit dwell within you and inspire you in conversion and perseverance, to stewardship and love, in order that you will be properly prepared for the coming of our Lord in every sense.

Happy Advent & Merry Christmas!

~ Marybeth Bergström

easy life here on earth. Experiencing trials and death helps us to realize and value how both true love and everlasting life is only in God.

I often wonder: Am I enough of a sheep to follow the Shepherd home? I am handicapped by my depression and my FMS along with other chronic issues. Seeking relief from these often leads me down dead end roads. Embracing my pain is what unites me with Christ, but it is so hard to do. A life of pain and suffering leads many of us chronic illness patients to try to avoid **any** pain at all costs; but that can easily get us into trouble. Ironically, those of us with low self esteem issues are amazingly and sometimes, uncontrollably, self-centered. Everything affects us so deeply while our coping mechanisms are frequently quite unhealthy. However, I have discovered that I have to face my demons, embrace the difficult road that's before me. I also need to remember that I am not the only one suffering or in crisis. Furthermore, I can remain a victim or I can use my experiences to help others, as I continue to search for answers, treatments and cures. Now, I see what a gift our Lord gave to us in His suffering, showing me that I

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A voice cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord...make straight the highways for God.

Gift of Love *Cont. from p.3*

can too can try to empty myself as he did for the world. Isn't it funny how we learn more from our mistakes and seemingly negative experiences? The song that sings, *Refiner's fire, my heart's one desire*, makes sense now, though I have to admit ~ it isn't very pleasant. God does use our trials and tribulations to refine us, turning us lumps of coal into brilliant diamonds, . . . well, eventually, . . . hopefully.

Emmanuel! God is with us! He cares so much about us that *he came on the earth, . . . shared our lives, gave us worth*. And still He walks beside us, teaches us, *lifts* us up, and heals us. He was not what many expected, but He was and is exactly what we needed Him to be. As we follow His story through the Bible and the writings of Church Fathers and Mothers, the saints, both in heaven and among us, He continues to give us the ultimate *Gift of Love* ~ his Body and Blood to nourish us and His life as our Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

It is a struggle for me to remember how my Lord is with me every moment of every day. And it is painful when He reminds me of how imperfect I am. Yet, I hate to be judged because with judgments come those criticisms, constructive and not. Having FMS, I have had a lot of non-constructive criticisms leveled at me. Not being able to tell people why I have trouble doing certain things has caused a lot of problems. I am hypersensitive to everything, so I always have to remind myself to listen first, analyze second, keep what is useful and forget about the rest. Journaling is a great way for me to keep track of what and Who is working in my life. I sometimes look back at months or years of journaling and I am surprised by what I find there. For some passages, it's as if someone else wrote the words I see on the page. When I am in nature and when I write, I have mystical experiences with the Lord. I open my heart to welcome the Spirit, who comes and dwells within me. I believe that sometimes He takes hold of my pen or the keys on my laptop to inspire me, admonish me, guide me, and to remind me ~ Emmanuel (God is

with us). Only when I "let go and let God", as the famous phrase states, I find rest and understanding.

The Seasons of Advent and Christmas are about preparing the way of the Lord, making straight all pathways for him. They are about the gifts of love he bestows upon us. We all have a story. Some have shared theirs with us at Mass. I continue to share bits and pieces of my story through the publications I write for this parish. Sharing our stories is what brings us closer to each other while realizing how God works in our lives. No story is too insignificant. I guarantee you that there is someone who needs to hear or read what each of you have to say. Also, just being present with someone and listening to them is a gift of love as well, for both recipient and sharer. I can't tell you how many times I have been blessed by hearing other people's stories, or parts thereof. As a chronic sufferer of a strange disease, sometimes the only comfort I can obtain is someone being present with me, consciously listening to me, validating my experiences and feelings. So, I try to be that to others as well. More often than not, we find that we're not alone in our sufferings, questions, sadness, longings, and frustrations. We experience God through each other.

Our personal and collective aim is to be good stewards of gifts that God bestows upon us. While that includes donating money, it also means sharing our stories, our abilities, our time, our prayers, our attentiveness, our full and conscious participation at Eucharist, spreading the Good News, lending a helping hand wherever it's needed ~ there are endless ways we can empty ourselves and be gifts of love like Christ to our community and to the world. TOGETHER, we make a difference.

Glory be, Lord, to Thee, God of our salvation, bless the gifts of love we all have and offer, in communion with each other, as active and participating members of Your Body. Show us Your mercy, grant us Your peace, as we seek to make straight the highways for You.

~ Marybeth Bergström



References and Footnotes*:

Gift of Love. Text 1980: Robert P Trupia. PERSONENT HODIE 66 66 6, with refrain from *Piae Cantiones*, 1582. Keyboard ACC by Craig S. Kingsbury. OCP Publications.