



Second Sunday of Advent

December 8, 2019

Readings

This week:

Isaiah 11:1–10

Romans 15:4–9

Matthew 3: 1–12

Next week:

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

James 5:7–9

Matthew 11: 2–11

Psalm

Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever. (*Psalm 72*)

Today's presider is Fr. Larry Percell.

Today



The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waverley and Homer Streets, Palo Alto. Members of the Thomas Merton community participate in planning these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to “full, active and conscious participation” in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate, there are return envelopes in the bulletin on the last Sunday of each month for your convenience (donations by check or cash are welcome). The donation basket is in the back of church after Mass or available by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC envelope in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

Calendar

Monday, December 9, 7:00 pm TMC Liturgy Committee, Thomas House library
Friday, December 13, 6:00 - 8:00 pm STA Fish Fest, Thomas House (see pg. 2)
Sunday, December 15, 10:30 - 12:00 Kenya Help Craft Fair, Thomas House

From Thomas Merton

The certainty of Christian hope lies beyond passion and beyond knowledge. Therefore, we must sometimes expect our hope to come in conflict with darkness, desperation and ignorance. Therefore, too, we must remember that Christian optimism is not a perpetual sense of euphoria, an indefectible comfort in whose experience neither anguish nor tragedy can possibly exist. We must not strive to maintain a climate of optimism by the mere suppression of tragic realities. Christian optimism lies in a hope of victory that transcends all tragedy: a victory in which we pass beyond tragedy to glory with Christ crucified and risen.

Seasons of Celebration

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development. Visit: www.thomasmerton.org.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

Friday Fish Fest dinner December 13:



The STA Site Committee has resumed the Friday Fish Fest dinners on the “teenth” Friday of the month. Are you ready once again for tasty fish filets, chips, and tangy cole slaw? Come December 13 at 6:00 p.m. for this traditional fish supper in the Thomas House in the friendly company of others in our parish. Christmas caroling in the living room with Larry Schemel will help with digestion (6:45 - 7:30 pm).

Take a break from kitchen duty and join us on December 13.



Please, please RSVP to Helen Baumann, 650-327-9236, hbbumann@aol.com in advance. We need to be sure to have enough fish for all of you.

Help decorate Christmas altar on Dec. 22:

The 8:45 Liturgy Committee hopes you might have time to help decorate the altar for Christmas. The job will have to be done on Sunday, December 22, at 2:00 p.m. (This timing takes advantage of the availability of team members who hope it works for some of you!).

Heart & Home shelter meal on Dec. 19:

The Heart and Home Women's winter shelter is open! Our parish is committed to providing a meal to the ladies at the overnight shelter on Thursday, December 19th at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto. We encourage parishioners to prepare a small homemade dish for 6 or more as a personal contribution to this dinner to support the efforts of many people to house homeless ladies during the cold, wet winter nights. Please call Human Concerns rep Terry at 650-714-2131 for any questions or contributions.

Seton Sing-a-Long + treats Dec. 15:

All are invited to a Seton Sing-a-Long with tasty treats on Sunday, Dec. 15, 9:30 am - 12 noon at St. Elizabeth Seton School in the St. Albert the Great Hospitality Center.



Enjoy a little Christmas cheer as we sing Christmas songs together, drink hot drinks and eat pupusas, tamales and more...yum!

Please join us after Mass in the Thomas House for coffee and donuts. We especially encourage newcomers or those passing through town to stop by for food and fellowship.

Adopt-a-Family gift collection:

We are collecting the Adopt a Family gifts for the tags you selected in November.

Please wrap the gifts, including the gift cards in a small box, to add gifts to open. Please attach the red tree tag on the front with the family and child's name visible. You can bring the gifts to our table in the back of church on both Dec. 8 and 15 before and after 8:45 Mass.



Please do not put these gifts under the tree in the back of church. That is a separate gift drive.

Thanks and blessings for your generosity. Call Barbara Kent (650) 3230879 to make arrangements as needed.

Kenya Help Craft Fair December 15:



The final Kenya Help Craft Fair of the season will take place Sunday, Dec. 15, following the 8:45 a.m. Mass, in the Thomas House.

Come on over to the Thomas House for coffee and doughnuts and take a minute to view the handmade crafts from Kenya. Your donation to Kenya Help supports the high school scholarships that are available to needy girls and boys in the Naivasha area of Kenya. Read heartwarming success stories of young people whose Kenya Help-funded high school education has carried them into university studies and career trainings--far forward from where their family circumstances placed them. And pick up that last Christmas gift for a special friend or relative!

PRAY FOR US: Please remember in your prayers this week Art Adams, Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, Tom Carmody, Kerry Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Jim Davis, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Dick Freeman, Deonna Gill, Emily Gill, Joanne Hasegawa, Fr. John Hester, Dean Judd, Hunter Kubit, Dick Jackman, Alicia Kot, Fr. Bill Leininger, Andre and Alyssa Lippard, Deacon Ysidro and Dolores Madrigal, Patricia Markee, Nancy Marty, Maureen Mooney, Hayden Pastorini, Alicia Placone-Combetta, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, and T. J. Wooten.
[Add/subtract names by e-mailing Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net.]

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COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

Saints for a new situation:

[By Fr. Ron Rolheiser, 12/2/19]

Everywhere in church circles today you hear a lament: Our churches are emptying. We've lost our youth. This generation no longer knows or understands the classical theological language. We need to announce Jesus again, as if for the first time, but how? The church is becoming ever more marginalized.

That's the situation pretty much everywhere within the secularized world today. Why is this happening? Faith as a spent project? Secularity's adolescent grandiosity before the parent who gave it birth, Judeo-Christianity? The "buffered self" that Charles Taylor describes? Affluence? Or is the problem mainly with the churches themselves? Sexual abuse? Cover-up? Poor liturgies? Poor preaching? Churches too liberal? Churches too conservative?

I suspect it's some combination of all of these, but single out one issue here to highlight, affluence. Jesus told us that it's difficult (impossible, he says) for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. No doubt, that's a huge part of our present struggle. We're good at being Christians when we're poor, less-educated, and on the margins of mainstream society. We've had centuries of practice at this. What we haven't had any practice at, and aren't any good at, is how to be Christians when we're affluent, sophisticated, and constitute the cultural mainstream.

So, I'm suggesting that what we need today is not so much a new pastoral approach as a new kind of saint, an individual man or woman who can model for us practically what it means to live out the Gospel in a context of affluence and secularity. Why this?

One of the lessons of history is that often genuine religious renewal, the type that actually reshapes the religious imagination, does not come from think-tanks, conferences, and church synods, but from graced individuals – saints, wild men and women who, like St. Augustine, St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, or other such religious figures can reshape our religious imagination. They show us that the new lies elsewhere, that what needs fixing in the church will not be mended simply by patching the old. What's needed is a new religious and ecclesial imagination. Charles Taylor, in his highly respected idea of secularity, suggests that what we're undergoing today is not so much a crisis of faith as a crisis of imagination. No Christians before us have ever lived within this kind of world.

What will this new kind of saint, this new St. Francis, look like? I honestly don't know. Neither, it seems, does anyone else. We have no answer yet, at least not one that's been able to bear much fruit in the mainstream culture. That's not surprising. The type of imagination that reshapes history isn't easily found. In the meantime we've come about as far as we can along the road that used to take us there, but which for many of our children no longer does.

Here's our quandary: We're better at knowing what to do once we get people into a church than we are at knowing how to get them there. Why? Our weakness, I believe, lies not in our theological imagination where we have rich theological and biblical insights aplenty. What we lack are saints on the ground, men and women who, in a passion and fidelity that's at once radically faithful to God and fiercely empathic to our secular world, can incarnate their faith into a way of living that can show us, practically, how we can be poor and humble disciples of Jesus even as we walk in an affluent and highly secularized world.

And such new persons will appear. We've been at this spot before in history and have always found our way forward. Every time the world believes it has buried Christ, the stone rolls back from the tomb; every time the cultural ethos declares that the churches are on an irrevocable downward slide, the Spirit intervenes and there's soon an about face; every time we despair, thinking that our age can no longer produce saints and prophets, some Augustine or Francis comes along and shows that our age, like times of old, can too produce its saints; and every time our imaginations run dry, as they have now, we find that our scriptures are still full of fresh insight. We may lack imagination, but we don't lack hope.

Christ promised we will not be orphaned, and that promise is sure. God is still with us and our age will produce its own prophets and saints. What's asked of us in the moment is biblical patience, to wait on God. Christianity may look tired, tried, and spent to a culture within which affluence and sophistication are its current gods, but hope is already beginning to show its face: As secularization, with its affluence and sophistication, marches unswervingly forward we're already beginning to see a number of men and women who have found ways to become post-affluent and post-sophisticated. These will be the new religious leaders who will teach us, and our children, how to live as Christians in this new situation.

[Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is president of the Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio, Texas.]

 * Advent Wreath Prayer *
 * Loving Creator *
 * We pray in thanksgiving *
 * for the John the Baptists of the world *
 * who hold up a mirror to our faces and urge us to repent. *
 * In this second week of Advent, we ask that you help us *
 * listen to John the Baptist and prepare the way. *
 * May we be found without spot or blemish. *
 * May we prepare a party fit for a King. Amen. *

Catholics oppose restart of federal executions:

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Catholic Mobilizing Network, the national Catholic organization working to end the death penalty and promote restorative justice, delivered a petition to President Donald Trump and Attorney General William Barr on Thurs., Dec. 5 opposing the planned restart of federal executions. The petition was signed by nearly 3,000 U.S. Catholics, including signatures from prominent clergy and Church leaders such as Most Rev. Joseph A. Fiorenza, Archbishop Emeritus of Galveston-Houston, Most Rev. William Justice, Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco, and Sr. Helen Prejean, C.S.J. Catholics join law enforcement officers, judges, victims’ family members, and more in speaking out against the government’s efforts to execute federal inmates. On December 2, 2019, the U.S. Justice Department asked the Supreme Court to lift a preliminary injunction on federal executions after a 16-year hiatus. The injunction has temporarily halted the federal executions scheduled for December 2019 and January 2020....

A recent Gallup poll shows that a higher percentage of Americans now say they oppose capital punishment than at any other time in the modern history of the U.S. death penalty.

The Catholic Church’s opposition to capital punishment is well-established. St. John Paul II, during a 1999 visit to St. Louis, Missouri, stated in a homily that “the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil.”

Nearly 20 years later, in August 2018, Pope Francis and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith revised the Catechism of the Catholic Church to call capital punishment “inadmissible” in all cases “because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person” (CCC 2267)...

While the Catholic stance on the death penalty stems from its pro-life commitment, Catholics also recognize that the federal death penalty is riddled with the same issues found at the state level, including racial bias, arbitrariness, and innocence, and the targeting of vulnerable and at-risk populations such as those living in poverty and those who experience severe mental illness, intellectual disability, and brain damage.

--Ignatian Solidarity Network Staff, 12/5/19

Speaker Pelosi prays for Trump:

[By Thomas Reese, SJ, *America*, 12/5/19]

The political atmosphere in our country has become so toxic that it becomes a news story when the speaker of the House says she doesn’t hate the president.

“I don’t hate the president,” said Speaker Nancy Pelosi. “I pray for the president all the time.”

Pelosi was responding to a reporter’s question after she had announced that she was asking the House of Representatives to impeach the president. She was asked if she hates the president by a reporter who cited Rep. Doug Collins’ statement that the Democrats are trying to impeach the president because they hate him. Collins, a Republican from Georgia, has been a staunch defender of President Donald Trump during the impeachment hearings.

Pelosi strongly rejected the question, which she saw as an insult to her faith and her upbringing.

“I don’t hate anybody,” responded Pelosi. “I was raised in a Catholic house. We don’t hate anybody, not anybody in the world. Don’t accuse me of hate.”

Being accused of hatred was, in Pelosi’s mind, the same as accusing her of being a bad Catholic.

“As a Catholic, I resent your using the word 'hate' in a sentence that addresses me,” she said. “I don’t hate anyone.”

Hatred was not part of her upbringing, she said. “I was raised in a way that is a heart full of love.”

On the contrary, she said, she always prays for the president. “I still pray for the president. I pray for the president all the time.”

Pelosi’s response was founded on Catholic theology and the Gospels. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”

Or as the Gospel of Luke puts it: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

In Catholic theology, you are not supposed to hate anyone, even those with whom you are at war. Yet the word "hate," and its reality, is ever present in American culture. People unite around their common hatreds as much as around their common loves. Political scientists note that it is easier to motivate people to vote through hatred than love.

Politics is supposed to be about the common good, the good of the community. It is supposed to be about what brings us together in a common cause, not what divides us into warring factions.

If we want better politics, prayer might be a good place to start. We could begin by asking for forgiveness for our hate, and then pray for those with whom we disagree. Being together on our knees before God should remind us that we are all God’s children and we should act like it.