



Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2019

Readings

This week:

Isaiah 7:10–14

Romans 1:1–7

Matthew 1: 18–24

Next week:

Sirach 3:2–6,12–14

Colossians 3:12–21

Matthew 2: 13–15, 19–23

Psalm

Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory. (*Psalm 24*)

Today's presider is Fr. Russ Roide, S.J.

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

Sunday, December 22, 2:00 pm

Decorate altar for Christmas in the church

Tuesday, December 24, 6:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve Mass, St. Thomas Aquinas Church

From Thomas Merton

Mary, who was empty of all egotism, free from all sin, was as pure as the glass of a very clean window that has no other function than to admit the light of the sun. If we rejoice in that light, we implicitly praise the cleanness of the window. And, of course, it might be argued that in such a case we might well forget the window altogether. This is true. And yet the Son of God, in emptying himself of his majestic power, having become a child, abandoning himself in complete dependence to the loving care of a human mother, in a certain sense draws our attention once again to her. The Light has wished to remind us of the window, because he is grateful to her and because he has an infinitely tender and personal love for her. If he asks us to share this love, it is certainly a great grace and a privilege, and one of the most important aspects of this privilege is that it enables us, to some extent, to appreciate the mystery of God's great love and respect for his creatures.

--New Seeds of Contemplation

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

Help decorate Christmas altar today:

The 8:45 Liturgy Committee hopes you might have time to help decorate the altar for Christmas. The job will be done today, December 22, at 2:00 p.m. It is especially helpful to have some younger, nimbler people on hand--the Nativity figures are stored in the choir loft upstairs. The more hands and feet in the church sanctuary, the more efficiently the altar is brought into bloom.



Greenery and flowers needed: Evergreen boughs are needed for the wooden creche. Please bring fresh cut boughs to church on Dec. 22, or drop

them off Sunday afternoon in the church during the decorating activities. Also, while we have ordered poinsettias for the altar, additional potted flowers in

Christmas Giving Tree info:

Please return your tagged gift(s) to the giving tree in the back of the church today. The gifts will be given to children in East Palo Alto who may otherwise not have a gift on Christmas.

Christmas Eve Mass is at 6:00 pm:

Please note that the TMC Mass for Christmas is at 6:00 pm on Christmas Eve. There will be no 8:45 am Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas on Christmas Day.

Save February 8 for Rosemary Ellmer:

Saturday, February 8, 3:00 p.m., at OLR Hall: The Future of the Church in the Light of the Clergy Abuse Scandals, with Dr. Rosemary Ellmer.

A licensed clinical psychologist, Dr. Ellmer has worked for over 15 years at Santa Clara University both as an adjunct professor and a clinical psychologist and training director at the university's counseling center. She will share her frank reflections from the fields of psychology and theology on the current crisis facing the church.

At the request of Bishop P.J. McGrath, in the fall of 2018 she moderated the four diocese-wide listening sessions held to seek input from people in the pews on the pathway to reform and to listen to those victimized by clerical sexual abuse.

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.

Parish Christmas Masses:

Christmas Eve – Tuesday, December 24th

NO Daily Masses

- 5:00 pm - Family Mass – Our Lady of the Rosary Church
- 5:00 pm - Family Mass – St. Albert the Great Church
- 6:00 pm – St. Thomas Aquinas Church
- 7:00 pm – Our Lady of the Rosary (Spanish)
- Midnight Mass 12:00 am – St. Thomas Aquinas (Latin/ Gregorian)

Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25th

- 9:00 am – St. Albert the Great Church
- 10:30 am – Our Lady of the Rosary Church
- 10:30 am – St. Thomas Aquinas Church
- 12:00 Noon – St. Thomas Aquinas (Latin/Gregorian)

Mass Schedule for January 1, 2020

Holy Day Of Obligation

Solemnity of Mary, Wednesday, January 1st Holy Day of Obligation

- 7:15 am – St. Thomas Aquinas
- 8:30 am – Our Lady of the Rosary
- 12:00 pm – St. Thomas Aquinas (Latin/Gregorian)
- 12:15 pm – NEW St. Albert the Great

PRAY FOR US: Please remember in your prayers this week Art Adams, Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, Char Buchholz, 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, Mercedes McCaffrey, 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]

TMC Board: Gerard McGuire, gerardmc@aol.com, 650-814-2223
Bulletin: Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net; Bob Capriles, bob_capriles2002@yahoo.com and Margaret Capriles, caprilesm@gmail.com
Finance: Helena Wee, 650-323-7987, shhwee@sbcglobal.net
Hospitality: Jim Davis, 328-2584
Liturgy: John Arnold, 325-1421, jsaoso@comcast.net
Sally Benson, 408-972-5843, sallymbenson@gmail.com
Membership: Kay Williams, 650-270-4188, kaywill@pacbell.net
Needs Net: Roberta Kehret, 650-494-1488, robkehr@yahoo.com
Adult Education: Jim Davis, 650-704-8002, Jim_Davis@pacbell.net
Mary Coady, 650-261-9155, coady_94025@yahoo.com
Website: Jim Davis, 328-2584, james_davis@pacbell.net
SpeakOut Committee: Diana Diamond, dianaldiamond@gmail.com

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

Before we sing Silent Night:

[By Wes Granberg-Michaelson, *Sojourners*, 12/17/19]

Advent does not bring good news for President Donald Trump. That's not due to impeachment, but because of the lectionary.

The scriptures assigned to the church during these days of hopeful waiting are filled with warnings against unjust rulers. This is repeated frequently in the Psalms, in the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and in the prayerful praise offered by Mary. The Magnificat, whose words are sung and prayed hundreds of thousands of times during these days, speak forcefully about the demise of the proud and conceited — and rulers who act like tyrants.

With a focus that often consigns Advent to candle-lighting in a rush to get to Christmas, we miss the important message of this season. Our hope for the One who is born as the Christ, the anointed one of God, means God's intentions for this world and its people will be fulfilled through the birth of Jesus. And that, in the words of scripture, amounts to bad news for rulers who act like tyrants, neglect the poor, oppress strangers and aliens, and subvert God's desires for justice and righteousness. This hope for the One who comes runs so deep in the scriptures of Advent because he will make the world right, through the presence of God's power and love.

Bad rulers are held accountable in the mysterious ways of God. That's as clear as can be in the words of the Bible, focused especially during these days before Christmas, when candles are meant to be the sign of hope in the midst of so much that seems so wrong in the world.

Impeachment is a pragmatic, political means of accountability. In our present context, it has turned into a political brawl. The likely outcome, namely acquittal in the Republican-controlled Senate, will simply galvanize our nation's political polarization further. It's not clear what will be accomplished. Even if President Trump is defeated in 2020, a form of accountability in the electoral process, that is not likely to change Donald Trump. He'll simply claim he is the victim of some sort of conspiracy and seek to further aggravate his political base. Deep change and healing in our body politic is hard to imagine.

I'm wondering, genuinely this Advent, just how God's promise to hold unjust, conceited, power-hungry rulers to account actually happens. It often seems the historical evidence isn't on God's side. In my wildest of hopes, I wish Donald Trump could hear the message of Advent's scripture, and respond, even repent.

One thing I am sure of, however: If we don't listen to

these biblical promises, and even worse, if Christians make excuses and decide that Mary really isn't to be believed, and that we simply must bless this president with our suppliant loyalty, then we push the promises of Advent away. And that's betraying the hope embedded in this season and dishonoring the baby Jesus.

Before we sing Silent Night, let's listen to the Psalmist's description of the just and righteous king, let's pay heed to Isaiah's plea to prepare the way of the Lord with righteousness and justice, and let's believe that the baby in Mary's womb caused her to proclaim that unjust rulers would be brought down from their thrones and the rich sent away empty. That is part of the message in these days moving toward the holy night.

[Wes Granberg-Michaelson is the author of the *Future Faith: Ten Challenges Reshaping Christianity in the 21st Century* (Fortress Press).]

Decreased use of death penalty:

[By Carol Zimmerman, *Catholic News Service*, 12/18/19]

Use of the death penalty in the United States continues to decrease, according to a report released Dec. 17 by the Death Penalty Information Center.

The report said this year's 22 executions and 33 new death sentences were down from the previous year's 25 executions. This year also marks the fifth consecutive year when there were fewer than 30 executions and 50 death sentences. The report also noted that death sentences have declined by more than 85% and executions by more than 75% from their peaks in the 1990s.

"It is encouraging to see the continual decline in the use of the death penalty in the United States," said Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, which works to end the death penalty and promote restorative justice.

"People in the pews and clergy at the highest levels of Catholic leadership are lifting up the church's unconditionally pro-life stance and working to build a criminal legal system that honors the sacredness of human life," she added in a Dec. 17 statement.

This past June, the U.S. bishops voted to revise the death penalty section of the U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults, reflecting an earlier change made by Pope Francis and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2018. The Catechism of the Catholic Church now states that the "death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person."

...The report also highlighted this year's Gallup poll results about the death penalty that showed most Americans support life imprisonment over the death penalty, revealing a shift in the majority opinion on this issue for the first time in 34 years. #

* **Advent Wreath Prayer for Fourth Sunday** *

Father, all-powerful God,
your eternal Word took flesh on our earth
when the Virgin Mary placed her life
at the service of your plan.
Lift our minds in watchful hope
to hear the voice which announces his glory
and open our minds to receive the Spirit
who prepares us for his coming.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
AMEN

Anchoring ourselves within God's goodness:

[By Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OFM, *The Valley Catholic*,
12/13/19]

What would Jesus do? For some Christians, that's the easy answer to every question. In every situation, all we need to ask is: What would Jesus do?

At a deep level, that's actually true. Jesus is the ultimate criterion. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and anything that contradicts him is not a way to God. Yet, I suspect, many of us find ourselves irritated in how that expression is often used in simplistic ways, as a fundamentalism difficult to digest. Sometimes, in our irritation at this, we spontaneously want to say: Jesus has nothing to do with this! But, of course, as soon as those words escape our mouths we realize how bad that sounds! Jesus has a lot to do with every theological, ecclesial, or liturgical question, no matter its complexity. Granted, there's the danger of fundamentalism here; but it's equally as dangerous to answer theological, ecclesial, and liturgical questions without considering what Jesus might do. He's still, and forever, a non-negotiable criterion.

But while Jesus is a non-negotiable criterion, he's not a simplistic one. What did Jesus do? Well, the answer isn't simple. Looking at his life we see that sometimes he did things one way, sometimes another way, and sometimes he started out doing something one way and ended up changing his mind and doing it in a different way, as we see in his interaction with the Syro-Phoenician woman. That's why, I suspect, within Christianity there are so many different denominations, spiritualities, and ways of worship, each with its own interpretation of Jesus. Jesus is complex.

Given Jesus' complexity, it's no accident, then, that theologians, preachers, and spiritualities often find in his person and his teachings ways that reflect more how they would handle a situation than how he would. We see this in our churches and spiritualities everywhere, and (I say this with sympathy), not with judgment. None of us gets Jesus fully right.

So where does this leave us? Do we simply rely on our private interpretation of Jesus? Do we give ourselves over uncritically to some ecclesial or academic authori-

ty and trust that it will tell us what Jesus would do in every situation? Is there a "third" way?

Well, there's a "third" way, the way of most Christian denominations, wherein we submit our private interpretation to the canonical ("dogmatic") tradition of our particular church and accept, though not in blind, uncritical, obedience, the interpretation of that larger community, its longer history, and its wider experience, humbly accepting that it can be naïve (and arrogant) to bracket 2,000 years of Christian experience so as to believe that our insight into Jesus is a needed corrective to a vision that has inspired so many millions of people through so many centuries.

Still, we're not meant to park the dictates of our private conscience, our critical questions, our unease with certain things, and the wounds we carry, at our church door either. In the end, we all must be true to our own consciences, faithful to the particular insights that God graces us with, and mindful of the wounds we carry. Both our graces and our wounds are meant to be listened to and they, along with the deepest voices within our conscience, need to be taken into account when ask ourselves: What would Jesus do?

We need to answer that for ourselves by faithfully holding and carrying within us the tension between being obedient to our churches and not betraying the critical voices within our own conscience. If we do that honestly, one thing will eventually constellate inside us as an absolute: God is good! Everything Jesus taught and incarnated was predicated on that truth. Anything that jeopardizes or belies that, be it a church, a theology, a liturgical practice, or a spirituality is wrong. And any voice within dogma or private conscience that betrays that is also wrong.

How we conceive of God colors for good or for bad everything within our religious practice. And above all else, Jesus revealed this about God: God is good. That truth needs to ground everything else, our churches, our theologies, our spiritualities, our liturgies, and our understanding of everyone else. Sadly, often it doesn't. The fear that God is not good disguises itself in subtle ways but is always manifest whenever our religious teachings or practices somehow make God in heaven not as understanding, merciful, and indiscriminate and unconditional in love as Jesus was on earth. It's also manifest whenever we fear that we're dispensing grace too cheaply and making God too accessible.

Sadly, the God who is met in our churches today is often too-narrow, too-merciless, too-tribal, too-petty, and too-untrustworthy to be worthy of Jesus ... or the surrender of our soul.

What would Jesus do? Admittedly the question is complex. However we know we have the wrong answer whenever we make God anything less than fully good, whenever we set conditions for unconditional love, and whenever, however subtly, we block access to God and God's mercy. #