

Homily for the Second Sunday of Advent
December 8, 2019
By Camille and Bill Pitocco

Today marks the second week of advent... the season of hope in the church. We are hopeful about the coming of our lord Jesus Christ at Christmas time – 2 weeks and 2 days from now! We are hopeful about sharing the joy of the season with our families. As the Chaplain for the catholic daughter, I'm hopeful that the tamale sales go great this weekend and We are hopeful for our Catechumens, for the men's retreat in January and so much more! Christians are filled with perpetual hope and the reason they are is because God is faithful.

In today's first reading, seven-hundred years before the coming of Christ, when the Kingdom of Israel was falling apart, God promised that he would not abandon his people. He promised to send a Savior, a descendent of King David, a "shoot from the stump of Jesse". What Exactly does that mean?! Well, every year around this time the seasons change. The bright colors of the foliage; the trees going bare and the grass getting brown; symbols of the end of fall and the arrival of winter. But think about the spring and picture the small buds of a crepe myrtle peak out from its old branches, or the first growth of a blue bonnet rising from the brown earth or Camille's favorite, the little yellow flowers on a

tomato plant that tells us tomatoes are on the way. These are the “shoots” from the stumps of winter; the fulfilled promises of new life - Just like 2000 years ago, when Christ was born, and Isaiah’s promise was fulfilled.

And to make sure that the suffering people of Israel at the time would recognize this Savior, God sent a messenger to announce his arrival: John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit sent John to make the preparations, to remind the people of Israel of their covenant with God; to inform them that the promised Messiah was soon to arrive and to instruct them about how to get ready. These are the actions of a faithful God, a God who keeps his promises.

And just as he kept his promise to the People of Israel, so too does he keep his promises to us. On the day of our Baptism, God promised that he would never abandon us; that he would never abandon YOU! He promised that he would never stop sustaining us with his grace, love and truth. Our Catechism tells us, "At every time and in every place, God draws close to man". And the words of John the Baptist today are reminding us of that: our God is faithful. God's faithfulness is the rock-solid foundation of Hope, one of the Christian's most important virtues. Hope is the engine of a Christian's life. It is what moves our world and what keeps us in motion! Hope is the parent of all effort and endeavor

in the Christian life and if our hope is strong, our lives are strong. It is the knowledge of God's faithfulness that keeps our hope strong.

One night at a dinner party a man who had spent many summers in Maine told a fascinating story about his experiences in a little town there named Flagstaff. The town was to be flooded, as part of a large lake for which a dam was being built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped. The people began complaining. What was the use of painting a house if it was going to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was going to be wiped out? They became selfish and weren't helpful to each other. Week by week, the whole town became more and more unkempt, dilapidated and despairing. Then, the gentleman added an explanation – he said "where there is no hope in the future, there is no power in the present."

Isn't that kind of like our society today? Separate vision about the future; reliance on ourselves. Complaining and naysaying about everything! Where is the hope in the future that John was talking about; where is the hope in the future that Isaiah was talking about? Where is the hope in God! St Paul puts the spotlight on it in the Second Reading today. He writes that, "Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the

Scriptures we might have hope." In other words, the history of God's saving action amongst humanity, which we turn our attention to during Advent, should stir up within us an energetic supernatural optimism – An optimism St Paul calls "hope". Hope is the opposite of discouragement and pessimism. It is the confidence that no matter how dark it may get in the middle of winter; the light of Christ will never be extinguished. The devil hates hope. He loves discouragement, because it breeds doubt and despair. He does his best to turn our attention to the shadows and darkness, to the problems and failures.

Think about all the things that may have discouraged you in this life - it is your hope in God that brings you to this very moment! If we give in to discouragement, our faith becomes completely passive, completely impersonal. How can we beat the devil? How can we lead others to escape from the paralysis of doubt and discouragement? It begins with being the Isaiah's in a world that is falling apart; to boldly be the voice in the desert of the times! To understand ourselves as the "shoots" from the stump hopelessness!

God is sending you and I, into the world to make the preparations, to remind the people of today of their covenant with the God, to inform them that the promised Messiah is soon to arrive, and to instruct them about how to get ready. Sure, everyone is called to do that, but in this

sanctuary today lies the heralds of the remarkable Catholic Church, men and women who come to mass and allow the spirit to work in them! Together we are the ones who will bring the mission of Christ himself to life in this world! To be people of Christian hope, we can't join with the naysayers and complainers that draw attention to the darkness. We must learn to turn the darkness into Christ's light; to direct earthly problems to heavenly solutions! That's how true Christians think and live because we know God's power and we know God's wisdom and we know they are without limit.

When we share that knowledge with the world, we share hope: When we share that hope we become hope. My sisters and brother, where is the hope that Isaiah and John were talking about? Right here in this Church! When we leave our father's house today, let's do as St Paul instructs us, go out into the world and STIR IT UP! Stir up hope in every heart! Because each of us are the shoots that rise from the stumps of this tired and discouraged society, the very witnesses to the fact that our God is faithful!!