Second Sunday of Advent – December 7/8, 2019 – Reflection

“A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom.”

(Isaiah 11:1)

Since I first came to the Worcester area in the 1970’s, it seems there has been constant construction and re-construction work done on the arteries that lead traffic into and out of the city: I 290; I 190; and RTE 146. Not so very long ago, a major reconstruction project totally re-did the exit and ramps that led from 290 to 146 and from 146 to 290. When the project was at long last completed, I marveled at the smooth pavement, the attractive lights and bridges, the neat landscaping, and the brick and stone walls. Not many months after the interchange was opened in pristine condition, I began to notice that out of sheer rock and stone and brick walls, were emerging little flowering plants that certainly hadn’t been planted by any human hand in a beautification project. These flowers and weeds seemed to be growing right out of solid hard surfaces and reminded me that, despite the best efforts of planners and engineers and bricklayers and masons, life manages to find a way.

Way back when Isaiah the prophet was writing to the people of Israel, he looked at the monarchy of the kingdom and called it rotten, dead, an old lifeless stump. So he felt the faith of the people and their priests
had become: rotten; dead; an old lifeless stump. But the prophet 
foretold that the true King of Israel, the Lord God, would not leave 
things that way. He would rekindle the fire. He would send forth His 
gifts anew. He would raise up a new Kingdom: a Kingdom of justice and 
peace; a Kingdom of righteousness and holiness; a Kingdom where the 
Prince of Peace, the Messiah, would reign forever. All of this the hand 
of the Lord would bring forth from the dead stump of Jesse, father of 
David the king of long ago.

More than two thousand years ago, that shoot pushed up through the 
hard manger stone of Bethlehem and lit the world with the star of 
God’s love. But since that long-ago Christmas Rose first bloomed in 
Bethlehem, too many of us have allowed the good soil of our hearts to 
be paved over and covered with hardness. We fight for ourselves and 
not for the oppressed. We amass for ourselves and not for the poor. 
We make forts for ourselves and those like us and keep all the peoples 
streaming to the mountain of the Lord out. And, far too often, the 
Church, the Rock of Ages, the sanctuary and hope for the peoples, has 
allowed herself to join forces with the world in exploiting and abusing 
and stockpiling only to see her own walls and halls empty and crumbling. 
The Manger is hard and cold, empty and lifeless.

A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse.

Though the soil of the Church be contaminated by scandal and venality, 
the seed of faith can still grow there. Though the heart be walled in 
and jaded, Love is on the way. Though the mind and soul be exhausted 
and empty, Hope can take root. And, though the hands have been 
crippled with fruitless labor, the Lord can give them strength anew to 
plant and tend and harvest a new flowering of faith in our land.
The Christmas Story is not a fairytale ... it happened and it happens still. The Church is not selfish men feathering their own nests; it is the People of God working to plant the Kingdom of God, the Peaceable Kingdom on the earth. And, your heart is not so hard, so stony, so walled that God cannot plant the seed of the Christmas Rose and have Him bloom right within you. The mercies of the Lord are not spent ... they are renewed each day with the coming of the dawn.

Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!

Of Jesse’s lineage coming, as those of old have sung.

It came a flower bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night.

O Flow’r, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,

Dispel in glorious splendor the darkness ev’rywhere;

True man, yet very God, from sin and death now save us, and share our ev’ry load.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come, and be born in our hearts.