

4<sup>th</sup> Advent A

**Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6.; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24**

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/122219.cfm>*

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*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,*

You heard it in the Old Testament reading.

You heard it in the Gospel Acclamation...

and again in the Gospel.

It will be repeated yet again later in the Communion Antiphon.

It pays to pay attention.

If something is repeated 4 times, then I think we are supposed to pay attention to it.

We are supposed to hear God in this.

God is saying something to you, today, through his living Word.

I will repeat this again, more slowly, and I'll give you a few seconds to think about what is God saying to you.

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,*

*(some quiet reflection time)*

As I listened, I became mostly focused on the word, "Emmanuel".

St. Matthew helps me when he adds that it means, "*God is with us.*"

Is that what I am supposed to hear today if I am attentive to the whole of Mass, to all the readings, the prayers and the hymns?

I have to confess that I have some difficulties paying attention to all of Mass, even when I am here in the sanctuary assisting.

At the altar, the priest does the heavy lifting,  
the deacon doing something now and then and piping in here or there.

Well, one's mind can kind of wander.

There are times when just before I am to remove a pall or lift a chalice that I discover my mind had drifted... only for it to return just in time.

With a nod of appreciation towards our altar crucifix,

I, some how, am back in focus and ready in time.

I'm guessing that attention and focus is a challenge for others, too.  
Our mental wandering is a part of our brain design.

For example, on a SWAT call-up of a barricaded gunman, I was assigned to the inner perimeter.

That is the ring that is meant to contain the threat.

I was not afforded much cover and so I chose a prone position with my AR-15 in the shallow ditch in front of the home.

I was to be alert should the gunman come crashing out the front door with guns blazing.

Well, during the prolonged time of stalemate while our negotiators coaxed and conjoled,

**I found myself wondering... about my daughter's soccer game--- Now, really?**

There's not enough of a life threat in front of me to maintain my focus?

Such is our brains.

We realize all of that on the SWAT team, so we prepare mentally, not to have minds of steel, but to allow our attention to flow in and out of conditions yellow and orange so as to be ready for condition red.

All this is just to give you some moral permission to cut yourself some slack when you get frustrated about not remaining attentive to every word and prayer at Mass.

Ritual helps us.

It opens our minds and hearts in little rhythms of expectation, hope and fulfillment.

We are about to recite the Our Father...

and now we are reciting the Our Father.

Fr. James is about to present us with the Body and Blood of Christ...

and look, there he is with the Blessed Sacrament poised over the chalice of Christ's Precious Blood.

So allow our liturgy to help you expect, hope and receive God with us.

Isaiah counseled King Ahaz that God would be with them during the threat of invasion.

The Jews in later centuries saw the promise of the Messiah in the prophecy.

Matthew understood the fulfillment of the prophecy in Bethlehem.

And we are to hear our eternal hope when in our Lord's ascension he proclaimed,  
*"And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."*

This is God with us.

When we come to receive Him at Communion, we take Him into us,  
into our very own body and blood,  
our very own soul and to share in his divinity as he shared in our humanity.

In our preparation for the Nativity of Christ  
and in expectation and hope in his Second Coming,  
open your minds, your hearts and your ears.  
Allow God to be with us.

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