

First Sunday of Advent – Year B (Nov. 30, 2008)

It's the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new church year. Liturgically speaking today is New Year's Day. That means that once again we begin to retell the story of our salvation; once again we begin to recall how God so loved the world that he sent his only Son. God so loved the world. And once again we hope, we hope, that this time perhaps we will get it right. We hope that this time we will be convinced of God's unconditional love for us and come to understand how to respond to that love.

On this First Sunday of Advent in the year of our Lord 2008, there is both good news and bad news in this world of ours. The bad news is only too obvious. It's been shouting at us from our TV screens, our radios, and the headlines in our newspapers: Unending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. In this country alone there are more than 37 million people living at or below the poverty line and that threatens to get worse before it gets better. Tens, maybe hundreds of thousands of people have no roof over their heads, and we hear daily of people being murdered not only in our cities but in posh suburbs as well. It's not a pretty picture at all. And you may well be saying to yourselves, "Why remind us of all these awful things. We come to church for encouragement, to feel good." Yes, we do come to church for encouragement, not necessarily to feel good although that's great if it happens. We come to church to remember who we are and where we are and what they Lord requires of us. We come to pray over our response to God's great love. And we come to give thanks to the Lord our God for all the good things he has done for us. And that brings me to the good news.

The good news is this: we know that the Lord came to us long ago. We know that the Lord will come again in glory to gather us all into the peace and joy of God's Kingdom. But best of all, we know that the Lord comes to us every day in countless ways. God still loves the world so much that he continues to send his only son. And Jesus, his only son continues to encourage us, to instruct us, to guide us, to challenge us to follow ever more closely in his footsteps.

But that's not all. There's more good news. We are a parish of

generous people. We have tried to respond to the challenges of the Lord. We respond well when others come to us for help. We bring turkeys for Thanksgiving, toys for Christmas. We are rebuilding St. Rose de Lima and support Maria Madre de Los Pobres. We do Hands on Housing and shelter the homeless along with other Georgetown churches in the winter. We do good things.

But you know there is something more we have to consider. You may have heard it said that the good is often the enemy of the better or the best, and we have to be careful that that does not become true in our parish. What do I mean? Well, it's possible to look at all the good things we do and think, hey I've done my part. It's possible to become complacent with our acts of charity and not realize there is much more to be done.

While we take care of the poor who come to us for help we have to ask ourselves a very important question and that is: Why are they poor? Why is it that even after we help them they are still poor? And what can we do about that? It may be that our parish has to move beyond doing good for the poor to helping conditions in our society and our culture that are unjust and need to be changed. Beyond doing works of charity we may have to become advocates for systemic change that will benefit those most in need. This is not an easy thing to do and it is not something we will be able to do all by ourselves. But there must be some little part that we can play in creating conditions that will benefit the poor, the weak, the needy. Our parish's Social Justice Committee is trying to move us in this direction but it will need a lot of help.

Having said all that I feel I must add this, which to some of you may seem simple-minded and naïve. I am convinced that if we really understood, really understood, the love of God for each of us individually and for all of us together, our response would take care of many of the problems our nation and the world is facing. I am not so simple-minded or naïve as to think it would solve them all, and I know that no one of us individually can do a great deal. But you know, working together there is much we can accomplish.

In spite of all that bad news I mentioned at the beginning I am optimistic. I have hope. Barack Obama, our president elect, wrote a book called *The Audacity of Hope*. It's a good book, and it expresses just what

our Advent attitude must be: It must be one of hope. Hope you know is based on promises, promises that we know will be fulfilled. Our hope is that the God who loved us so much that he sent his only son will continue to be with us. Jesus will continue to be Emmanuel. He will continue to love us, to strengthen us, to call us, to challenge us, and to give us the courage to respond and follow him. He will give us the grace to do it. I am convinced. I have hope.