

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Dec 9th 2018

Second Sunday of Advent

What a beautiful prayer imbedded in the reading from Philippians. Paul begins with the simple statement, I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you and continues by stating his confidence that the one who began the good work in you will continue until the end of all mankind. To me, the “one” Paul is referring to is the Holy Spirit, who joined us at the time of our baptism, which ties in nicely with the Gospel reading about John the Baptist and our baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sin.

Then, with the simplest of prologues, And this is my prayer, Paul continues:

that your love may increase ever more and more

in knowledge and every kind of perception,

to discern what is of value,

so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

filled with the fruit of righteousness

that comes through Jesus Christ

for the glory and praise of God.

To me, the essence of his prayer is that we as Christians must let the Holy Spirit fill us with an ever-increasing love that knows no limits. What a wonderful thought and prayer that is, but in today’s world (especially in the United States), with the slanted news coverage that is spewed 24/7 on every cable news show, and the animosity cultivated on social media websites, is this possible? How can we let love grow in our hearts and minds when we are constantly bombarded by spite and condemnation? How can we let love grow in our hearts when we are constantly being conditioned to find fault in our neighbor’s actions, rather than to extend forgiveness and understanding?

Maybe Paul gives us a clue about how to let the Holy Spirit enter more deeply into our lives, one that is consistent with our daily Examen of Conscience, when he prays that we learn to “discern what is of value” from a heart that is filled with love instead of animosity. The practice of discernment is not an easy task but it is something we should strive to incorporate more and more into our daily. When we are engaged with someone, whether through business or personal interactions, we should try and view them and our conversation with an open heart, not one closed off by presupposed feelings or prejudices. And this is doubly true with spouses and family.

All too often we pick the smallest of “hills to die on” because our hearts are closed off and we have not

let the Holy Spirit take control. Through the daily practice of discernment, we can grow closer to God, so we can learn to take notice when our actions and personal motives are interfering with our freedom to live our lives in faith, hope and love.

So, on this Second Sunday of Advent and as we continue with the “New Year of the Church” it is not too late to make a New Year’s resolution that through our continued discernment, we will become more in concert with God, who is not only present in our every moment but in everything in the Universe, so our hearts can be filled with love.

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