

## **The Inclusive Community**

### **Third Sunday of Advent**

**Sunday, December 14, 2008**

**“The Joyful Sunday”**

**John 1:6-8, 19-28**

**Homily of Anthony Padovano**

Advent is a season of darkness in which we light fragile candles of hope. For three of the four Sundays we are made conscious of the fact that waiting is a time when we do not see. It is also a time when we cannot be certain that the darkness will ever end or that our waiting will have any point to it. We have all been there: uncertainty in our lives, impatience, wondering if there is a point to it all, questioning ourselves about whether what we are waiting for is worth it or if it shall ever come. Waiting is a time for dreams and delusions. The human heart breaks when the dreams vanish and the delusions are revealed for what they are, mistakes and missteps that took us down all the wrong roads we traveled.

The third Sunday of Advent, however, strikes a different theme. In the Catholic liturgy, it is called “Joyful Sunday.” Protestant worship now takes up the same theme. On this day, the colors for our service are not the somber violet but the lighter shades of blue and rose.

The point of this “Joyful Sunday” is a sense we all get in our waiting that it will not be in vain. We can think of the times we waited and realized that the waiting would almost certainly bring us what we wanted most. These were the times when we sensed that the relationship we wanted more than anything else was going to work and was going to lead to marriage. We were not certain but it seemed very likely this was going to happen. And we were ecstatic.

There were times when we had assurance that the pregnancy was going to come to term and the child would be healthy. We had not seen its face yet or even perhaps known the gender but everything seemed to indicate that the waiting would bring us life.

There were times when the career we wanted and the income we needed and the financial responsibility we required to stabilize our families, all of this seemed as though it would happen. We would have all we needed and, really, far more than we ever thought possible when our first fears led us to imagine we might not have a home or be able to take care of our partners and all the others who would depend on us.

Advent, especially this “Joyful Sunday,” is just such a day. On this day, the liturgical theme is that it looks as though what we wanted so much is going to happen. All the waiting will have been worth it.

**But what have we been waiting for anyway?**

**Today's Gospel tells us that we are waiting for the light.**

**One of the most beautiful lines in Scripture, one of the most beautiful lines ever written, occurs in today's reading. "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."**

**There are two themes I wish to explore about this line.**

**The first is that nothing can stop the light. The "true light...was coming into the world." No darkness can put it out and no despair can stop its advance. No depression can be permanent and no fear can last long. A "true light" is coming into the world and we shall be surrounded with it and we shall be bathed in its refulgence and we shall dance in its glory. A "true light" is on the horizon of our lives always and it shall burst, in our lifetime and in our waiting, into glory and grace. The darkness yields not only to our fragile candles of hope but to the sunrise which nothing can stop.**

**Today's Gospel reminds us of all the times when we thought the light would never come and all the times when it did. We found love and we found life and we found God and we found friendship and we found memories and we found a home and a family and we found joy and we found health and we danced in the light over and over again. We must not see only the darkness but all the times when it was gone.**

**The second theme in this wonderful line from Scripture is this: this light "enlightens everyone." No one misses the light. Everyone is enlightened. One need not be Jewish or Christian, Hindu or Buddhist to be enlightened. One need only be human. One need only have a human heart and a human face and one is enlightened. Light does not come from a church or from a culture or a career. Light comes from something more important than any religion. It comes from birth. This is why the human family is so ecstatic when a child is born. The child is light coming into the world. It is God's life in a baby's heart.**

**Humanity is enlightened. Every culture knows how to dance and how to sing and how to hope and how to celebrate. Every person who lives has moments of peace and happiness and feels the light that the human family never loses.**

**In all the heartache of life, in all the shattered dreams and wounded bodies, in all the death and destruction, in all the fear and corruption and sin and waste and chaos, in all of this the light never dies. This is why we go on and why we rebuild. This is why we never stop having children and caring for them, why we never stop looking for bread and sharing it, why we never hear the prophets of doom for long but keep looking for the heralds of hope. This is why we never stop falling in love and why we always weep in the face of the goodness of life and laugh uncontrollably at times as life brings us the sheer joy of its very presence.**

**The true light was coming into the world – for everyone. What a line. What a thought.**

**Do not go home today without having heard it. Let us all look into our hearts during the quiet moments of this service and let us remember how often we walked into the light and how our greatest fears far more often than not never happened.**

**The true light was coming into the world – for everyone. Let no religion or culture or church dare tell us it has the light and we do not.**

**When God looks at us, God sees light. Everything less than God may only see darkness. But that is not because we are in darkness but because they are blind. God looks at us and sees light. The very act by which God turns to see us is an act that brings light.**

**We must go home today convinced that we are light-bearers and that there is no darkness in us which lasts very long and which ever extinguishes the light.**