

2nd Sunday of Advent December 7-8, 2013 Our Lady of Hope, Fort Plain NY

*♪♪ Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live
A place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive/
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:♪♪*

ALL ARE WELCOME, ALL ARE WELCOME, ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE.

The reading from Isaiah gives us a picture of what the world would look like if we accepted one another as Christ accepts us. The world would be at peace, even animals who are natural enemies would be at peace. The wolf and the lamb [**Children come to front with wolf & lamb puppets**], the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear - and this cow & bear come all the way from Schoharie County [**Children come to front with cow & bear puppets**].

And these animals were symbols of more than livestock in the prophet's time, as they still are today. They represent people, tribes and nations that usually don't get along, and are even sometimes at war. (Of course, that never happens today, does it?)

And what if the Lion spoke Arabic, or the wolf spoke Spanish? Would that be an obstacle for *us* to welcome him or her? Isaiah gives us a vision of a peaceable kingdom, a different vision of what is possible than we our culture usually gives us.

The stories that Jesus tells, and the one he lived are about that same vision - where the common good is the bottom line, and justice and peace are possible because his followers will accept nothing less from their leaders, from each other & from themselves.

This is the vision I found in a new book by Jim Wallis, entitled: *On God's Side, What religion forgets and politics hasn't learned about serving the common good*. The title is based on something said by Abraham Lincoln, "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side." It is a book I think every member of congress and anyone in public service needs to read & it would be great spiritual reading for Advent & Lent. I gave a copy to my NY State Assemblyman on Friday, at the tree lighting in the village of Schoharie.

Christ welcomes you to this Mass and you are called to welcome anyone who comes to Our Lady of Hope as a member of his family. You have certainly welcomed Sr. Anna and myself this weekend. We are all called to live the words of St. Paul today, "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you." The song we sang describes what a parish is called to be.

But we have a ways to go before the vision of Isaiah becomes a reality in the world or the Church, don't we?

We have a ways to go before justice flourishes, and the fullness of peace is real as we sang in the Responsorial Psalm.

We have a ways to go before the story of Christmas is the one that frames our lives as individuals, as a church or as a world throughout the year.

Our world is being destroyed by corporations and nations who put profit ahead of justice, power before people, and luxury before the good of the planet. The despair that leads to terrorism is met by the fear that justifies oppression and torture. The stories our culture tells us of how to live the good life, of how to be secure, of how to be "somebody" sustain structures and patterns of greed, starvation and injustice.

Nuclear weapons held in reserve - enough to destroy the earth 10 times over, will not guarantee security; wealth gained at the expense of the poor will not make anyone truly happy, addiction to comfort and luxury which ignores the limits of the environment will not protect us from global climate change, higher gas prices, & destructive oil & gas spills.

Advent is an invitation from God to hear another story: The story of the one who welcomes all of us, and reveals the whole human race as the family of his Father. Advent and Christmas are sources of hope that **we** can tell a different story by the way we live, and by the choices we make - as individuals, as families, as a church and as a human race.

But to really follow Christ in my everyday life, I need to first let **him** welcome **me** into God's place of peace and truth and love. I need to accept his invitation to receive his love and forgiveness before I can reform my life the way John the Baptist shouts in the Gospel. I like to break up that word, reform, and see it as re-forming my life, giving it a different form.

Then I will have the grace from his Spirit and the energy that will give me such a fire of love that I can welcome every person I meet as if she or he were Christ. To accept one another as Christ accepts us, to love one another as Christ loves us is only possible with the *grace* of God's Spirit and the *work* of re-forming my life. But when we live that out, the world truly can be changed.

That grace is what God offers us in this Eucharist. That grace is what gives us the light and the energy to work to build God's kingdom. The pattern of re-forming our lives is the pattern of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus which we celebrate in the central prayer of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer - where we hear his story again and pray once more that the same spirit that changes the bread and wine into Christ's body and life-blood will fill us.

You will hear these words in a few minutes. They are a part of the Eucharistic Prayer. Listen for them so they can become real in your lives. "Father most holy, fill us with your spirit through our sharing in this meal... heal every wound and division. Make your church throughout the world a sign of unity and an instrument of your peace."

*♪♪ Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground, where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:*

ALL ARE WELCOME, ALL ARE WELCOME, ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE. ♪♪