



# The Line

Diocese of the West

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## Warm Christmas Greetings Brothers and Sisters

Hope you are all doing well and coping with this busy holiday season. I would like to share part of a sermon preached at St Paul's Cathedral on Christmas Day, 1626, by John Donne.

The whole life of Christ was a continual passion, others die martyrs, but Christ was born a martyr. He found a Golgotha (where he was crucified) even in Bethlehem, where He was born; for to his tenderness then the straws were almost as sharp as the thorns after, and the manger as uneasy at first as His cross at last. His birth and His death were but one continual act, and his Christmas day and His Good Friday are but the evening and morning of one and the same day.



## The Bishop's Corner

There are three Advents which exist simultaneously: The first is the ideal Advent, a time of quiet preparation of the soul for the coming, once again, of Our Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts, a heart made ready by an inventory of my life, motives, generosity, dedication, sacramental commitment, and my love for others. Regardless of how many times the Advent watch has been held, even in a long life, the same inventory of the soul is still important, revealing, sobering, and instructive. In Advent 1962, I was in Sweden as a young graduate student and experienced a society which shared that desire for an Advent of inner reflection and preparation, a quiet time when festivities were greatly curtailed, and a snowy dark external world invited inner journeys in peace.

The second is the actual Advent, which has been my own experience of every Advent since 1962. A frantic noisy time around me, bombarded with shopping messages, "Christmas" music blaring, shouts of "happy holidays," office parties, a large number of people depressed, lonely and unhappy, and expectations without possibility of fulfillment. A celebration of a celebration

## The Bishop's Corner (continued)

itself, devoid of meaning, attempting by sheer noise, tinsel, sentimentality, and artificial brightness, to compensate for an empty journey to nowhere. To attempt through sheer will power to persevere with an ideal Advent in the midst of all this around you is commendable, but the fact is, the external distraction can be overwhelming. You can tune out much of it, and certainly need not buy into the “happy holidays” message of celebrating nothing lustily. But it is like trying to read a complicated serious text next to a blaring TV. It simply is very difficult, and the act of doing so in itself robs you of the possibility for concentration without distraction. We are victims of multiple empty premature Christmas celebrations in which the real message is ripped from us by the people around us. When the day of real celebration happens, the rest of the world has already charged past and collapsed from the frenzy, too busy and exhausted to notice the story of events from first century small town Palestine. A recent TV drama has Santa being arrested and jailed, saying, “You’ve got to get me out of here or Christmas will be cancelled.” Really?

The third is the future Advent, ignored even by many devout Christians. For God, past is future, and the completion of redemption is entwined with the collapse of paradise in the Garden, necessitating the drastic measures to restore it. At a critical moment in time, divinity willed to be carnal, and humbly asked a humble woman to represent humanity in effecting the co-creation. That happened for us in the past. We do not need to wait until December 25, to know the results. Yet incarnation is not bound by time, nor relegated just to history books. The incarnate

Christ is born among us every day that faith is alive, because God, unlike Buddha, Napoleon or Alexander the Great, is not a passing moment in history, but an ever-renewing presence always. “His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation,” as his Mother put it. (Luke 1:50)

Thus, Christ will come again in glory as he once came in humility. In between, incarnation continues to happen. For a very long time, this has caused humans from Plato and Aristotle, through Gnostics Marx and Stephen Hawkins, to be confused. That religion is “spiritual” is widely believed. But Christianity isn’t off in a spiritual realm. It is incarnate, carnal, a concrete reality, right here among us. We review our lives and prepare our hearts in Advent because Christmas celebrates a reality, a day in history when Immanuel, “God among us,” happened, as long predicted and now long remembered. It is also the actual reality of God among us. And if we no longer have his presence in the way the disciples in Palestine experienced it, we have it in Word and Sacrament, with in fact greater clarity than they had, being so close to it as it unfolded. This Christmas, you receive the real incarnate Christ in the Eucharistic celebration. As he came to a humble virgin in a lowly stable, so he comes under humble forms of ordinary bread and wine. In so doing, he enters our lives so we might enter his Kingdom, humbly now, yet already with a glimpse of the glory to come.

The reality of the cacophony of the world’s desecrated Advent around us cannot be avoided. But it is overcome by the real, incarnate God, whose presence can transcend any scene.

## The Bishop's Corner (continued)

When the day comes to celebrate the Dayspring on high, be ready with enthusiasm, and take twelve days to do it, with the God who is here with us.

### Clericus

Clericus will be held February 1-3 (Monday evening to Wednesday morning), again at Holy Cross Retreat Center in Mesilla, NM. It is an event for diocesan clergy and spouses, all of whom will be accommodated. If additional space is available, interested laity and non-diocesan clergy and laity are also welcome. The theme will be "A Journey through the Kingdom," a sacramental tour of both liturgy and life. Registration forms and complete details will be available after Christmas, but mark your calendar now.

### Convocation

Anglicans don't seem to do well with uncertainties. It is therefore that the transition period from Diocese to Convocation is intended to only last a few months. I will try to visit our parishes before Clericus as much as possible, which means that it may be a weekday visit. As always, these visits will hopefully help to make the transition as transparent and positive as possible. Comments and questions are welcome and can be addressed not only to myself, but to any member of the Standing Committee. Yet it still apparently needs to be pointed out that this is not a scheme invented by the Standing Committee, but a necessity forced on us externally by the larger church. Both the Synod last July and the standing committee, as directed by

Synod, have acted responsibly in response. It makes what could be a dismal prospect into a positive future. As the saying goes, "If you are handed lemons, make lemonade." At the same time, a lobby for this diocese or that one is not helpful. If people do not wish to go with the direction of the Diocese, there is a clear process to opt out. But church decisions are best made through prayer, not through gossip, innuendo, allegations made privately so as not to be in danger of being refuted, and political-style campaigns for one's preferences. We are our Lord's flock with nothing that needs to be hidden from each other concerning this decision which has been imposed upon us.

All of that pales in importance compared with the love of God which has been showered on each of us and all of us. Merry Christmas, and may his love continue to shine in your life through dark times and bright times.

Your bishop,

+Win



## Parish News

What is the spirit of Advent?

I Thessalonians 5:12-23

I think we know the spirit of Christmas, about the birth of Jesus and His glory in the manger, but what is the spirit of Advent? Advent in the Roman tradition of four weeks was not always penitential. The Gallic Church had a nine week Advent, more penitential, and eventually we now have penitential, but it is a “joyful of preparation for the Feast of the Lord’s Nativity.” p. 49, Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs, Fr. Francis Weiser. The third Sunday, Gaudete, “bears a special character of joy.” p. 52, Handbook. In Advent, the Gloria is omitted, and in Morning and Evening Prayer we say the Litany.

Today, we look at I Thessalonians. What are some of the special characteristics of a time of preparation for our Lord’s birth? In the Gospel of Mark 4:24, “unto you that hear shall more be given.” Listening is a part of our spiritual lives. We often speak without thinking. It would be a good practice to be still and to listen to God and to what others are saying to us. This is not easy! I tried it one morning this week, and found it helpful, but it was hard not to speak. How can we change our habits unless we are willing to take time and to listen to God and to others?

### 1. First point

The Epistle points out some things that we do not often think about. We should pray and rejoice for those who are over us in this work. “And we beseech you, brethren to know them which labour among you, and are over you in

the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”

I Thess 5:12 To know is used in the sense of “to know the worth of.” They are exercising faithful leadership over us as they are in “the Lord.” Too often we are critical before knowing. Too often we lament instead of thank God for our spiritual leaders. “The most probable reading of the situation is that the leaders had rebuked those who had stopped working, who had erroneous views concerning the second advent....Paul counsels consideration and patience.” Thessalonians, Leon Morris

Secondly, another thing we do not often think of in Advent is what follows: “And be at peace among yourselves....we exhort you brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men....do not render evil for evil. Follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.” I Thess 5: 13b-15

Unruly is a translation of a military term for those out of ranks, and carries the meaning of purposeful idleness or loafing. Feebleminded is “those who lack courage.” They have been discouraged by particular circumstances. Be patient, not short-tempered with such. This is the idea of a “steady patience.” Morris

Lastly, point 3 - we should “rejoice” “evermore.” I Thess 5:16 We know Christians should be this way. Even the best of the saints have difficulty. I think all of us were quite surprised that Mother Teresa suffered thru such a dry spell in her spiritual life.

## Parish News (continued)

“If I ever become a saint—I will surely be one of [darkness],” Mother Teresa wrote in September of 1959. “I will continually be absent from heaven—to light the light of those in darkness On earth.” Two years earlier she wrote this to Archbishop Perier of Calcutta:

There is so much contradiction in my soul.—Such deep longing for God—so deep that it is painful—a suffering continual—and yet not wanted by “God—repulsed—empty—no faith—no love—no zeal.—Souls hold no attraction—Heaven means nothing—to me it looks like an empty place—the thought of it means nothing to me and yet this torturing longing for God.—Pray for me please that I keep smiling at Him in spite of everything. For I am only His—so He has every right over me. I am perfectly happy to be nobody even to God. . . .”

Yes, it is often hard to rejoice. We sometimes suffer, and no one wishes to spend an evening in ER, but thank God for great doctors here and hospitals that have open doors to us. We could lament about a lot of things, or we could be prayerfully positive and have a rejoicing attitude. Sometimes we need a spiritual 2x4 to know God’s goodness and love. In the moments He gives us like this, He is getting our attention. “Be still and know that I am God!” Psalms 46:10 I had such a moment this week when He slowed me down and showed me His power and His love. It brought a tear to my eye as I sat there in no room (there were no rooms) in the waiting area, and then led to a room and being told there were none, so I sat in another

waiting area, where the PA came to see me. But in that moment, I realized I had to slow down and listen to God. He got my attention.

What would our church, our community and our nation be like if we took time to say good things to people that needed good words, and we were thankful, rejoicing and prayerful in our attitudes. What a powerful statement that would be! Reverend David Mcmillan

## Parish News (continued)

### **The Herbert-Bennet Christian Education Building, St John’s Anglican Church Boerne, Texas**

On November 15, 2015, the newly erected Herbert-Bennet Christian Education Building was dedicated by the Right Reverend Winfield Mott. Bishop Mott led the procession from St. John’s Anglican Church to the new building where he stopped to bless the entrance before walking throughout the building, blessing each room and calling each to their intended purpose. Near the end of the Liturgy, they paused to recognize the two gentlemen who honchoed this project from its inception to its completion, Deacon Curtis Herbert and Senior Warden Jerry Bennett. The building will proudly carry their names. A bronze plaque in their honor will be mounted at the main entrance. However, they would not have been able to accomplish this task without the faithful support of other parishioners who worked and labored alongside them and under their direction. For their time, energy, and talent, we give thanks to the Lord.

Fr Donald Hughes

## Parish News (continued)

### Messiah Mission

In June of this year, Messiah Mission of Mesquite passed the missionary outreach on to Mesquite Lutheran Church (LCMS). The mission was an outreach to the nursing facility in town, and included nine non-residents who actively worshiped with the residents of the facility. However, for Susan and myself, the summer heat was more than we could tolerate. We needed to find a climate that would not have temperatures well over 110 degrees for days on end. In addition, our lay reader Bobby Cox and his family were planning to relocate to the Huston, Texas area. After prayer, and consultation with our bishop, the decision was made to pass the ministry to another Orthodox Christian church in Mesquite. It was not an easy decision for any of us, but we saw it as the only way to keep the ministry active.

Messiah Mission is still functioning as an active ministry, albeit in a different community. Susan and I have relocated to Saint Helena, CA, and have been working to establish a ministry at a local nursing facility in Napa. Messiah Mission at Piner has now been active for three months. Our services include a Sunday multi-denominational service and a Tuesday Anglican Service of Morning Prayer. What makes this new outreach so exciting for us, is that unlike Highland Manor of Mesquite, at Piner we have residences who are Anglican.

For the past four years, Messiah Mission has provided a service of Nine Lessons and Carols during the week before Christmas. Those services would not have taken place without the assistance of other churches in the community. This year the service will be held at Piner nursing home

with the assistance of the rector and choir of St. Stephen's Anglican Church (APCK) of Oakville, California. Susan and I thank Father Dillon and the organist and choir of St. Stephens for lending a hand. Tuesday December 23, we will have a service of Lessons and Carols at the nursing home. In addition to our Lessons and Carols service, we will celebrate Christmas Day together with a service of Holy Communion.

We ask for your prayers as we go forward spreading the good news of Christ Jesus to those who are not able, due to age and frailty, to attend church elsewhere. Reverend Bob Peterson

### Prayer Requests

**Pray** for the families of the victims of the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino, CA. Pray for protection for all against these horrific acts. Pray for peace.

**Pray** for God to lead us in the Diocese of the West as we move forward. May our choices always be His will.

**Pray** for those confined to hospitals and nursing homes. Especially during this holiday season.

**Pray** for those in the military not able to be with their families this Christmas. Pray for their safety as they protect our country.

**Pray** for the leaders of Christ's Church, and especially our own Bishop Mott.



Hint of Humor



and a little Animal Humor

