

To pray without ceasing is to allow our awareness of God's presence to become the prayer.

Third Sunday of Advent – Year B

IS 61:1-2A, 10-11, LK 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54, 1 THES 5:16-24, JN 1:6-8, 19-28



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It is hard to believe that it was just a couple of weeks ago that we were enjoying temperatures in the 50's and 60's. I remember it well because Renata and I had a play at the Civic Theatre. We arrived early so that we could walk downtown for dinner. The evening was pleasant, light jacket weather. Returning from dinner, we walked through Bronson Park. The children were having a grand time running in the fountains that had been drained for the winter. There were thousands of lights in the trees and on Candy Cane Lane. You could walk through the park from one circle of light to another. The backdrop was the sound of children running and playing with a sense of excitement and anticipation. Parents looked on smiling at their child's exuberance.

Advent is a time of excitement and anticipation. In one corner of the park was a crèche to remind us of the reason for the season. Standing there, I overheard a father asking a four year old, "Who is in the manger?" The child answered, "The sheep." Father tried again, "Who is in the manger?" The child answered, "The cow." Gently, the father asked again, "Remember the story mom and I told you? Who is in the manger?" This time the child answered, "Baby Jesus."

Like a walk through the park, our spiritual journey often moves from one circle of light to another. St. Paul asks us today to, "Pray without ceasing." Now, in the real world, what does that mean? How do we do that? Prayer is our conversation with God.

Father Mark Thibodeaux, S.J. writes, "As I grow in my prayer life, God begins to communicate with me on a more profound level than that of the five senses. God is not chatty. Yes, he does use words, images and so on, but he chooses each one carefully so that only a few of them are necessary."

Fr. Mark gives an example using one of his college students, Jim. “If Jim begins to date someone the two of them will have to spend a while learning how to communicate with each other. In the beginning, it will take Jim a long time and a lot of words to get her to understand how he feels about something. As their relationship grows and they get to know each other better, he will be able to communicate those same feelings more easily. After several years, merely a glance at his love will tell her all she needs to know. By the end of their long life together, she will often know what he's thinking or feeling without even having to look at him. The same is true for my long and wonderful prayer life with God.”

To pray without ceasing is to allow our awareness of God's presence to become the prayer. Like the old couple, just being in each other's presence, being aware of each other, communicates volumes. And so it is with God. There are times when God gives us a word or image that resonates so true and so deeply that there is no doubt from where it comes. An unexpected act of kindness, a thank you or a simple embrace; these are the moments of light and love that John has come to give testimony. His testimony is that the Divine love, Christ, is among us. The crèche in the Bronson Park is a reminder that Christ has entered our world and that his Sacred Spirit remains with us. That is the story the father shares with his child at the crèche. “Who is in the manger?” Jesus, and he is with us today.

Our moments of light where we experience God's love, come with great joy. Touched and moved by that abundance we are able to reach out in care of those in our community and in our families. Like the Prophet Isaiah, we are called to bring, “Glad Tidings... and to heal the broken hearted.”

In marriage, our hands are meant to convey God's love for our spouse. Together, as parents, we are the conduit of God's love for our children and grandchildren. The children running through the fountains in Bronson Park were showered, not with water, but with the grace of a parent's love. On hearing the shouts and laughter of a child, God smiles on us. We have much to rejoice and give thanks for.

Coming together today as community, Christ is with us in a special way. In the Eucharist, the Cosmic Christ that we seek in our spiritual journey offers his embrace and light. His presence is the gift that is ours to share this Christmas season.

Works Cited

All scripture quotations are taken from;. (1987). *The New American Bible, Revised edition*. USCCB.

Mark E. Thibideaux, S. (2001). *Armchair Mystic*. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press.