

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 4th Sunday Advent Year A1

I am sure that I am not alone in this: Have you ever had a plan you pieced together, and as time unfolded, everything did fall into place, but as you moved the plan along to almost its last step, suddenly, in the end, something happened like a major adjustment (completely out of your world's control) that made your plan not make any sense anymore at all. Like maybe a great Christmas dinner, invitations sent, RSVPs returned, all food items purchased and prepared, and the night before the dinner, a major snowstorm hits and no one can make it out to come. Or maybe like a teenager that works hard all summer to buy new chrome or aluminum wheels & low profile tires for his car, and that fall the engine throws a rod or transmission goes out! The car looks good (makes a good picture) but doesn't run! Maybe he could have it towed to the park or plaza and just stand by during cruise night, but that's all! Or for myself, one time my parents visited parish I was serving in, for Sunday morning mass together. I thought about how special it would be for me to prepare dinner for them. So, I cooked roast & vegetables that morning and figured that I would just leave it in the oven off, to keep warm while we were in mass. They arrived, and we visited a minute before heading over to the church, and as we left to go to church building, I hit what I thought I saw was off Clear button on the panel, but it was CLEAN button. Oh, the house smelled so bad when we got back over to the rectory--the meat/veggies were incinerated, or turned out as dried up as Jerky Roast! The timing was great, all pieces fell into place, but the end result wasn't anything like I planned. Though, we ended up having a good Italian dinner in town.

There is a classic short story by the writer O. Henry, called the 'Gift of the Magi'. It tells about a young married couple who struggle to make ends meet. They work hard but are still poor and just manage to get by. But for Christmas they want to do something special for each other and they agonize over what Christmas gift they can get each other with their meager resources. Such an unexpected and revelatory twist comes about, when they each settle on a gift for the other, that they can purchase by sacrificing something they each have. It turns out, that she has the most beautiful long hair, so she has it cut off to sell and buys a **watch chain** for her husband. And he loving her so much, sells his (yes the same one she bought a chain for) family heirloom **pocket watch** to buy her (of all things) a set of beautifully jeweled combs! It doesn't turn out as either of them

had planned. Yet as he says, “let’s put our Christmas gifts away, keeping them a while and just have our dinner.” Yes that’s a gift enough; each other.

I think this is what happens to good St Joseph in our gospel today. He had a plan; Mary was the one for him. He did everything right, introducing himself to Mary, visiting her, keeping the faith with her, and then comes the betrothal or engagement process and the big day is coming closer, when suddenly ‘surprise’- Mary is expecting a child all of a sudden. Yet, for them both, they know what they have done, or most importantly, not done between them in their courting relationship. So, what a change in plans! Joseph feels strongly that he cannot go forward with his initial plans, (that it just wouldn’t be honest or right to claim someone else’s child as his own-faking such paternity to the world), but Joseph as a compassionate and good hearted religious man, adapts his original plan, to dismiss Mary. He will provide caringly for her, but not in his home. He will discretely make arrangements for her, but not in marriage.

And this is when God intervenes, to reveal to Joseph a little more fully the greater plan that God has in store for everyone. It is as if God is saying, “Joseph that’s a good idea, but guess what? Count on me, I have an even better idea. You want to save your reputation, but I am saving the whole human family. This is so much bigger than just you and your plan. Get on board with my plan.”

Now I do want to commend Joseph for his ingenuity. As a carpenter, he is good at ‘workarounds’ and he knows well that when you don’t get delivered the supplies you ordered, you still have to produce to make the construction deadline. So he’s used to stepping back, readjusting and substituting parts, or making your own to finish the job. He is creative and crafty by trade! But that may be what God wants to teach him to let go of. Joseph’s solution is expedient for the short time, but God has eternity and all human history in mind. God teaches us through Joseph, that even our good ideas, (yes they may be very good, but God has even better in mind). The point isn’t how good they are, but whose ideas they are. I may have a good idea, but if its not God’s idea, it doesn;t matter in the long run. I need to send for review, my great plans/ideas to God, because God has everything in mind. He could tell me ‘Fine, your little idea is great, but you are settling for so little, compared to what I have prepared if you accept my plan.’ God’s will, not mine, is the eternally fruitful one. So, I have to admit, and step

back and submit to God's greater plan! My idea as good as it may be, is nothing in comparison to what God has in mind to accomplish through His own grand plan.

Romans 8:28 "We know that all things work for good for those who love God,*
who are called ***according to his purpose***

1 Corinthians 2:9 "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, ***what God has prepared*** for those who love him"