

[Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12a]

You and I are living between the day of our baptism and the day of our Funeral Mass. This is the in-between time, the present moment, when the Divine Potter – God – melts us, molds us, shapes us and uses us for His divine purpose, as a potter shapes clay. The potter has a definite design in mind. “What shall I make of this lump of clay?” the Potter asks. If we are pliable, if we allow ourselves to be shaped by God, we become the precious work of art He wants us to be. If we are stubborn, hardened or uncooperative, the Potter smashes us on the wheel and starts all over. When life smashes us, God’s poor but beloved clay, we look to the Potter to help make things right.

In the song, “Abba, Father,” we acknowledge that He is the potter and that we are the clay, the work of His hands. We pray that God molds us and fashions us into the very image of Jesus Christ, His Son.

St. John reminds us in our Second Reading today that even though we sometimes have feet and hearts of clay, we too are sons and daughters of God, His children. So we can call God, “Abba,” “Daddy,” as well as the Master Potter. We are clay, the work of God’s hands.

Everybody loves a big reunion with loved ones – the joy of seeing one another, telling stories and of course the food and fun! The Solemnity of All Saints is exactly like this. Pope Francis said, “We are all united with all the saints, not just the most well-known. But also those “next door” – our family members and acquaintances who are now part of that great multitude.” So today is a family celebration. The saints are close to us, indeed, they are our truest brothers and sisters. They understand us, they love us, they know what is truly good for us, they help us and they await us.

We believe that there is a unity and interaction among all the faithful in Christ. During these early November celebrations, those of us still living (the Church Militant) unite our hearts with, and in a special way remember, the faithful departed, whether they are in Heaven (the Church Triumphant) or in Purgatory (the Church Suffering). Pope Saint Paul VI calls all of us “The Faithful.”

St. Paul addresses the early Christians as “saints” (Eph. 1:1) and refers to those in Heaven as “that great crowd of witnesses.” Judas Maccabeus urges prayers for the dead, “that they may be absolved of their sin” (2 Mc 12:46). And the visionary of the Book of Revelation (Rv. 7:9-10) sees “a great multitude” as they stand before the throne of God.

In today’s First Reading, we are reminded that nobody in Heaven had been perfect in life, no one had been free from hardships. Indeed, some had died for their faith. All of them had “survived the time of great distress.”

St. Augustine says that “there is no saint without a past and no sinner without a future.” In our darkest moments, it is vital to remember that if we keep the faith and finish the race, we, too, will survive any time of great distress in our lives. How do we do this? By being submissive to the will of the Father, to be humble of heart, to be steadfast in prayer, and to put our possessions in perspective.

The Beatitudes which we heard proclaimed in today’s Gospel, shows us the method, the “how” of being molded and shaped into God’s image and likeness. Realizing our need for God. Being sad with those who are sad. Controlling our ego and pride. Showing mercy. Having only one purpose in life: to know God, to love God, and to serve God. To strive, to celebrate and to serve, as we say in our parish mission statement.

Today’s celebration of All Saints is an emphatic reminder that our faith heroes are the people we now honor as saints. To make sure that nobody is left out of the count, John writes that he has a “vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue.” We cannot possibly know all of them. But it is possible and important that we get to know some of them, even those who lived among us and with us in our time and in our place. Who knows, the list might even include you and me one day!

I conclude with a contemporary interpretation of the Beatitudes from “The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition” published two years ago:

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, He climbed up a hillside. The committed and able-bodied climbed up with Him. Arriving at a quiet

place, He sat down and taught His climbing companions. This is what he said:

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule.

“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are -- no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought by money.

“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared FOR.

“You’re blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart -- put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

“Count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit Me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are getting uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens -- give a cheer, even! For though they don’t like it, I do!”

And all Heaven applauds.

Life is a two-act play for people of faith. Life here and life eternal. Let us pray to all the saints to toss us a life-line, and to live by their example and enjoy their divine aid as models and intercessors. AMEN!

[Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Psalm 23; Romans 6:3-9; John 6:37-40]

Some fear it. Others hope for it. Some see it as proof of God's mercy; others as testimony to God's wrath. Many don't know anything about it, while many more have forgotten what they once knew.

The "it" is Purgatory, and when it comes to Catholic beliefs about the afterlife, the Church's teachings on Purgatory have long been among its most contested and misunderstood.

Someone asked this question: I've been reading about apparitions where Our Lady revealed to the children in Fátima and to Sister Mariana in Quito, Ecuador, that some souls spend the rest of time in purgatory, some priests, bishops and religious for 80 to 100 years! Wouldn't these folks have heard of plenary indulgences? It makes me depressed to think how long I could spend in Purgatory -- God willing if I make it!

The shortest answer I can give is this.

Of Purgatory, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned" (Nos. 1030-31)

There are, however, significant mysteries pertaining to Purgatory that merit a caution on our part. While it is true that numerous saints have had visions or ideas of Purgatory, their visions are not at the level of dogma. That Purgatory exists and that it is a place of purifications are indeed dogmas of the Church. But time or the exact manner of the purification is not fully known. Does time exist in Purgatory? If so, how does it relate to time here on earth? Is 80 to 100 years the same as here? It is not certain. Further, is Purgatory a fiery place of great suffering, or is the purification more gentle? Both images seem to be rooted in Scripture. Hence, it would seem that there is some release of sorrows also after death. So purgatory includes both suffering and healing.

It has always been the duty of the Church on earth to pray for the souls in Purgatory, and this is due to the belief that there is some degree of suffering. Purification and the letting go of earthly sorrows surely involves suffering.

As for plenary indulgences, this refers to a complete purification of all sin's effects and sorrows, and we can apply them to the souls in purgatory. But a full indulgence is not easy to obtain since one must be free of all attachment to sin. Rare indeed is such a holy soul here on earth. Thus, the remarks of Our Lady and other saints as to the lengthy purification of some souls can be seen as likely. Our prayers for them can lessen their time there even if we cannot easily gain a plenary indulgence on their behalf.

Any prayer or pious act applied to the souls in purgatory can be a way to pray for them. The most effective manner of praying is to have Masses offered for them or to apply the fruits of your own attendance at Mass. The Rosary, too, is a wonderful way to pray for them.

Most of us realize that few leave this world as perfect or pure, even if they are in friendship with God and in a state of grace. Some final work must be done to take away any final attachments to sin, any rough edges, any sorrows, regrets or hurts. These things are surely disclosed when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ (see 2 Cor 5:10).

So on account of this judgment and purification (that seems necessary and is taught), we pray for the dead that this process be swift and that they be in the full glory of heaven soon. Yet, still, it is our instinct to pray and assist them in those final finishing touches, as the Lord completes His masterpiece.

Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, And let Perpetual Light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. May their souls and all the souls of the Faithful Departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. AMEN!"

[2 Macc. 7:1-2, 9-14; Psalm 17; 2 Thess. 2:16-3:5, 16-18; Luke 20:27-38]

Why is there no marriage in Heaven? One husband jokingly said, "So we husbands can finally get a little peace and quiet! Of course in the Gospel example, the woman does survive being married to seven husbands! So, you go, girl!"

Another question: What is your understanding of the Resurrection? That's the question that Jesus indirectly poses when He challenges the Sadducees in this Sunday's Gospel reading. As Christians, we believe that someday we will experience a Resurrection like Christ's after we depart from this present earthly "age" or stage of life. All believers who follow Jesus will live as the angels do.

But do you believe in the Resurrection of Love? Jesus explains the Resurrection in terms of marriage. A marriage is supposed to be a reflection of God's radical love for His people. Marriage is supposed to unite one man and one woman in an enduring love that is the very presence of God. It gives witness to the world that God's faithfulness and commitment to us is real. Married spouses: do you reflect God's love and faithfulness to each other?

Marriage does not exist in Heaven because it's an imperfect love: We love our spouses more than we love others. In Heaven, we will love our spouses fully (yes, even our ex-spouses!) and we will love everyone else just as much. And those who have loved us poorly will love us better than the best spouse could love us now. Do we believe this? Who has failed to love you enough in this world? Who has caused you pain? How would you feel if that person were to greet you at the entrance of Heaven at the moment of your death? Would you have enough love for that person to get YOU through the door?

How close to the Apocalypse are we this week? Considering that Election Day is just around the corner, it may feel like we're poised on the brink of a volcano. Remember that we are not voting for personalities; we are voting for platforms and programs. Whatever happens on Tuesday, two things remain the same. One is that every citizen of voting age has a moral obligation to vote thoughtfully and prayerfully. The other thing is that whoever wins, we remain "one nation, under God, indivisible." Our unity is our sacred trust as citizens of these *United States*.

Regarding our First Reading: 200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, Jewish communities were just beginning to wonder about an afterlife. Until then, life was simply here. You were born, you die, and that's it. Eternity will rest only upon the good or bad reputation or legacy you leave behind.

This is one of the reasons why buildings and financial foundations and trusts are named after people: they want to be remembered after they are gone. What legacy are we preparing to leave others?

The Maccabees brothers were part of the "resistance." They were part of several disparate Jewish groups who fought their current gentile enemies who dared to take over the Temple in Jerusalem – the Jewish equivalent of St. Peter's Basilica or the Basilica of St. John Lateran – and placed their own pagan altar over the altar of the Holy of Holies. On this altar, the gentiles sacrificed pork and forced their Jewish prisoners to eat it. Including the Maccabees family.

We hear in our First Reading the mother and brothers' decision to choose death rather than to violate the laws of the One True God. If you have a chance this week, read the full chapter 7 of 2 Maccabees, and savor the eloquent farewell speeches given by each of the seven brothers and their mother. Some of the speeches bring tears to my eyes. About forty years later, the Jews had another revolt, liberated Jerusalem and restored their Temple. Ironically, with the help of their future oppressors, the gentile Romans.

How strong is MY confidence in God, and what would I be willing to sacrifice for my convictions? My security, perhaps; but the safety of my children? The Maccabees story goes as far as humanly imaginable to pose that question.

St. Paul in today's Second Reading has to evolve in HIS thinking about things as well. In his FIRST Letter to the Thessalonians, he thinks that the return of Jesus is imminent. He thinks that some of his fellow believers will not die, but will be alive at the time of the Second Coming. But by his SECOND letter, he changes his thinking and encourages the people to continue living their full and active lives, not just sitting around waiting for Jesus. St. Paul asks the people to pray for him and for his ministry, knowing that things will be getting worse before they get better. Actually, things only get worse for Paul. But God's grace and the prayerful support of Christian believers carry him through to the end. And that is very good news! AMEN!

[Readings: Malachi 3:19-20a; Psalm 98; 2 Thess 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19]

It's coming. The end of time. The Apocalypse. Judgment Day. That's what our readings point to. Actually, quite soberly, the readings point to the day and the moment when we breathe our last breath. Should we dread it? Should we be fearful? Should we be annoyed? Or should we be overjoyed?

Every year at this time the wisdom of the Church invites us to consider the Apocalypse. We can be forgiven our reluctance to take up the topic. The end of the world is a hazy unreality in the best of times. In the worst of times, it's a terrifying, proximate danger.

What's more to the point, we live apocalypse a lot more than we want to admit. Mortality stares us in the face the year-round. Some of us are getting old enough to be numbered in the actuarial tables at the insurance company. People we know are diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses or life-changing disabilities. Accidents on the job and on the road bring apocalyptic nightmares very close to home. When marriages break up, whole families enter into a free-fall. Random and deliberate acts of violence seize our orderly worlds and shake them loose from their moorings.

So does the searing humiliation that accompanies the loss of one's good name, or the coldly impersonal collapse of careers, finances, and fragile human dreams. Global warming, natural disasters, and humanly orchestrated devastation rock our senses whenever we dare to open our eyes and ears to what's going on. Who needs talk of Apocalypse from the Church when human lives are choked with it at every turn?

This is of course why the Church invites us into the conversation annually, so that we don't forget the Christian response to the end times. In times of crisis, whether personal or communal, lots of folks will react with outrage, pain, fear, and confusion. Another response is available to those who believe. What is that response? The answer to THAT question is easy.

It depends on how deep your faith is. It depends on your relationship with Jesus Christ. It depends on your status with the Church. How you are in these



three departments will govern your reaction to the reality of the end of our personal time on earth. Are you ready to “meet your Maker?”

To the disciples of Jesus, the Temple of Jerusalem was bedrock. Nothing could bring down these walls. The smallest stones in the structure weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of them weighed 50 tons. The largest existing stone is 12 yards in length and 3 yards high and it weighed hundreds of tons! There was no need for mortar tween the stones. Their stability was attained by the great weight of the stones. The walls towered over Jerusalem, over 400 feet in one area. Inside the four walls was 45 acres of bedrock which were shaved flat, and during Jesus' day a quarter of a million people could fit comfortably within the structure.

By comparison, the walls of this church go up only about 35 feet, and the buildings that make up our parish plant – the church, the parish center and the rectory, sit only on 10 acres, versus 45 acres for the Temple of Jerusalem.

You can then understand the disciple's surprise. They want to hear more.

Jesus' prediction that a structure so immense would be leveled to the ground seemed impossible. But they pressed Jesus for more information.

In their voice was fear. Fear that their lives were about to change forever. Jesus had not made any predictions like this one. This was different. This, they could understand. Forty years later Jesus' prediction came true. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed by Rome. Of course, it wasn't much of a stretch for Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke probably was written ten years AFTER the Temple was destroyed! Still, what are we to learn from this prediction and its fulfillment?

The Bedrock of Faith is not in temples. The Bedrock of Faith is not in signs. The Bedrock of Faith is in Christ alone.

History was made this past week. Proposal 3 was approved by the majority of Michigan voters. The consequences of this choice will be tragic.

How do we live with this knowledge? Some grow cynical about the humanity of the human race. Others succumb to depression, anxiety, or a life surrounded by fear. We can give up, give in, or behave like the Thessalonians: party hearty today, for tomorrow we die!

Even prophets like Malachi who envision the day of the Lord as a severe hour of reckoning don't throw in the towel on history altogether. After their return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple, the Israelites have become lukewarm in their faith. Malachi gives them a wake-up call to conversion or else!

God promises that divine justice lies on the far side of apocalypse. Indeed, God's justice resides on this side, too, though invisible to the eye and often neglected. If God can bring resurrection from crucifixion, forgiveness from sinfulness, grace from disgrace, then why not justice from humanity's greatest failings? Behold, God's prophets declare, the hour of consuming fire is also the hour when healing begins. The day of the Lord is terrible *and* great. Every dying contains the potential rising. Trust in it.

Jesus says that the day will come when not one stone of the temple will be left mortared to another, because it will all be torn down. He's reminding us that everything here on earth is temporary.

Make no mistake though, at some point you will find yourself fighting the good fight against apathy, anger, doubt, pride, resentment, or greed. You will feel unhappy, unappreciated, and unloved. It will be a hellish time, but don't despair.

The presence of evil, Jesus says, leads to our giving testimony: When bad things happen, we're required to raise our voices. We're called to answer the lies of our generation with truth. We confront villainy with values. We say no to fear, and yes to courage. We move forward as a Parish, a Family of Parishes, a Church, and as a country. So... How deep is your faith? What is your relationship with Jesus Christ? What is your status with the Church? Will we greet His return with fear or with joy? On the other side of our trials awaits a loving God Who will welcome us, embrace us, and reward us, if only we persevere and are faithful. AMEN!

[Readings: 2 Sam 5:1-3; Ps. 122; Col 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43]

Can you believe that this Thursday is Thanksgiving Day already? I'm still stuck in September. As we gather around the dinner table on Thursday, we will eat turkey or ham and maybe walk on eggshells. We may pass the yams and walk around minefields. In other words, we may enjoy the holiday as best we can with the people we are with! It is said that at family gatherings, it may be best to avoid topics regarding politics and religion, and now we add gender!

So it with the Israelites in today's First Reading. Even when Saul, his predecessor was king, it was David who called the shots. The elders of the tribes of Israel knew it was David who really wore the crown and signed the checks. Saul fell on his sword rather than surrender to the Philistines. Saul's three sons were already dead and gone, killed in battle. We would see David "anointed" two other times, by the tribes of Judah and then by those of Israel. He would be the "King of Kings" at least for our Old Testament Hebrew ancestors!

David knew that the king was responsible for two tasks: to lead and to feed. The people are to be fed with the truth; they are to be led into fruitful action energized by the truth. The seeming efficiency of dictatorship is enticing at times to every leader of individuals and groups -- even pastors! But true leadership is a byproduct of true faith. Faith moves one to lead humbly, by example and with love. David had such faith, and despite his faults and failings, he returned to his faith regularly and became the model for all future kings of Judah and Israel.

Contrast this to the false teachers who were emerging in the city of Colossae at the time of St. Paul. The Church's teachings were being targeted by all kinds of heresies and schismatic thought. False teachings threatened to distort the true faith and diminish the role of Jesus Christ as regards our salvation. False teachings still permeate our country, our state, even our Church! Paul's words today are both religious prayer and theological correction. Suffice it to say that Christ is the "icon," -- the very image of God Himself. We can know God by knowing Christ. Christ is the source from which the Church finds its very being and existence.

Death brings life. Faithfulness in suffering brings true and lasting freedom and peace. Now look at Jesus Himself on the cross. Alone. Abandoned. Naked. Humiliated. From all worldly assessments, one big, fat failure. A loser. And, the Church tells us today, a King. In fact, the NEW King of Kings!

At the moment of His apparent ultimate failure -- death -- someone is hanging around next to Him saying, "I believe in You. I want to live with You when Your Kingdom finally arrives." And Jesus turns to him in love and says, "You will. You will be with me this day in Paradise."

The last time I heard these words, when it was not the Feast of Christ the King OR the observance of Good Friday, was during the funeral homily for Fr. Bohdan Kosicki, a former weekend helper here at St. Martin de Porres. He and his pal, Fr. Jack Fabian, owned and ran a religious camp up north in Paradise, Michigan. After the Funeral Mass and luncheon, it was planned that Fr. Fabian would accompany Fr. Kosicki's body back up north. So it was quite fitting and quite clever that Fr. Fabian ended his funeral homily for Fr. Kosicki with these words, "This day, you will be with me in Paradise!"

Two veterans visit the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D. C. With tears in their eyes, they touch the names etched into the black marble: the names of their brothers and sisters with whom they served in Southeast Asia and with whom they were imprisoned by the Viet Cong. As they leave the memorial, one asks the other, "Have you forgiven your captors yet?" "No, never," his friend replies. His buddy pauses for a moment and then says, "Then it seems they still have you in prison, don't they?"

On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, we stand on the edge of Paradise; we look through the Doorway of Heaven. In His promise to the "good thief," Jesus opens the door to true freedom. He invites us to enter Paradise here and now. He has established the reign of God in our time and our place.

All we have to do -- and it is no small thing -- is to put our hurts and slights into perspective. To drop our demand for restitution and vengeance.

To realize our need to be re-created in the love of God.

That our crosses lead us to crowns.

The thief crucified with Jesus Christ recognizes that need in himself and calls out to Jesus. And Jesus, in the very last painful moments of His own life, responds with compassion and hope. In the shadow of the cross, we are finally able to admit our need for healing, for peace, for God. In acknowledging our own need to forgive and to be forgiven, to love and to be loved, to minister and to be ministered to, Christ's promise of Paradise is ours.

Lots to give thanks for on Thursday, Thanksgiving Day. Join us if you can for Mass at 9:30 AM with the special collection envelopes going towards our Christian Service outreach. There is also an interfaith service on Tuesday night at 7:00 PM at the First United Methodist Church of Warren on Chicago Road. Join us! Giving thanks is a universal concept, not limited to one religion.

Here's an idea. This Thursday, as we gather around in our living room, dining room, family room or restaurant, if we should find ourselves discussing controversial topics, let us do so not with emotion, but with compassion and with curiosity. Compassion – to speak in respectful tones and volumes. To try to look at the topic from the opposite point of view, and to identify any flaws. And curiosity – to discover why others take the opposite view from us.

Then to move beyond the differences to see what they may have in common, the shared values upon which we can build. To build bridges and not walls. To respect the basic decency of each other as made in the image, the icon, of God. By doing this, we proclaim Christ as our True King. And we enjoy a full and tasty meal in the process! AMEN!

[Readings: Sir 50:22-24; Psalm 67; 1 Cor 1:3-9; Luke 17:11-19]

One of the many delights I enjoy about children is how they respond when I give them something. There is a momentary pause of silence, and then I hear from the grown-up who is with them say – say it with me -- “What do you say?” Then the little one would say, “Thank you!”

Little Sarah was raised well by her parents. When she was two years old, she was extremely active. One day Sarah ran into the kitchen in search of a mid-afternoon snack. Hurriedly, she said to her mother: “Banana, Momma, Banana!”

Jodi, her mother, handed her a banana. Sarah quickly grabbed the banana and turned to rush back out of the kitchen. But before she took very many steps, her mother said: “Sarah, come back. What do you say?” Sarah screeched to a halt, turned back around and said: “Please! Thank You! You’re Welcome! God Bless You! And I Love You, Mommy!” Sarah covered all her bases! The only words Sarah’s mother was looking for were “Thank you.”

Why did only one man cleansed from leprosy return to thank Jesus? Someone has made a list of nine suggested reasons why the nine did not return: One waited to see if the cure was real. One waited to see if it would last. One said he would see Jesus later. One decided that he had never had leprosy in the first place. One said he would have gotten well anyway. One gave the glory to the priests. One said, "O, well, Jesus didn't really do anything." One said, "Any rabbi could have done it." One said, "I was already much improved."

- Can you relate to the nine lepers who were cleansed and went merrily on their way, without looking back? When you are ill or in pain, and then begin to feel better, do you take that healing for granted?
- How can you become more conscious of the many ways -- great and small -- that you experience healing every day? How can you make these healing moments an occasion for thanksgiving?

(The following is taken from a reflection by Fr. Joshua J. Whitfield, pastor of St. Rita Parish in Dallas, Texas)

To be grateful is to be human. The experience of gratitude is fundamental to the human experience. Unless something's gone wrong, some sociopathy, thankfulness comes naturally to us. We can't help it, that feeling of gratitude. It's hard to describe; I think we're born with it.

Giving thanks brings us close to the truth of creation, and gratitude brings us very near to God. That is, the experiences of wonder and thankfulness bring us nearer to the original perspective of the Garden of Eden, giving us the eyes we lost in the Fall of Adam and Eve' pride and disobedience. This is true of each act of wonder and thanksgiving, the smallest to the most sublime. When we're wondrously thankful, it's like the beginning of redemption, the experience of it — eternal festivity, the laughter of heaven.

But it's also the beginning of knowledge. Thanksgiving invites us to know God. At least, that was Naaman's experience. "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel," he discovered, thankful to be healed (2 Kings 5:14-17.)

It was also the invitation that the Samaritan accepted. Healed as the others were, in thanksgiving the Samaritan turned toward Christ. For him, healing caused thanksgiving, and thanksgiving opened the door to Christ — thanksgiving became knowledge.

And here we've come suddenly to the very plot of the Gospel, the unique story of Christianity. We are naturally wonderers; we're naturally thankful creatures. But these things that are true about us ultimately lead us to God in Christ. All our moments of wonder and thanksgiving point to Christ. They are not just fleeting experiences of the brain, they're the natural invitations of God. And we should cherish them as such.

This brings me to my last simple point. The word "Eucharist" -- the source and summit of our faith -- means "thanksgiving"; because it whispers perhaps the deepest truth there is to know, and that's when we discover in faith the reason for our gratitude, when we enter its Holy Communion. AMEN!

[Readings: Is 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matt. 24:37-44]

Over the past few weeks, I presided at the funeral of one man who was 102 and another man who was 101 years old. As I prayed privately before their Funeral Masses, I thought of all the things that they witnessed in their early years, and what they saw in their later years.

In 1920, transportation was moving from horse and buggy to the automobile. Communication was by telegraph for long distances and primitive hand-cranked or rotary telephones for local calls. News was read in newspapers. Handwriting was an art. Fires were put out with buckets of water. Prohibition begins in the United States. Women received the right to vote.

Then I thought of what they might have seen this year. Self-driving electric cars. Smart phones. Face Book, Twitter and twerking. Google News. Indecipherable handwriting! 30,000 pound fire trucks with aerial ladders. So much progress. But they also learned about abortions, bullying, addiction, pornography, road rage, noise pollution, and global warming.

This year, we find ourselves having to protect what it means to be male and female, what it means to be truly married, what it means to be a family. We prayed and worked for the defeat of Proposal 3 in the State of Michigan, but it passed. Progress generally is a good thing. Once in a while, though, our progress is hampered by setbacks. Obstacles we had not anticipated. Unexpected problems. Confusion, uncertainty and even despair.

That's when it's time to go mountain climbing! Now, I don't mean literally. I mean spiritually. Advent is a time for spiritual mountain climbing. In the time of the prophet Isaiah, the mountain top is where God lived. "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain." You cannot get higher than God. You cannot be smarter than God. We go mountain climbing so that God may instruct us in God's ways and that we may walk in God's paths. We walk in the light of the Lord. We emerge from life's shadows and crevices to the splendor and radiance of the summit of God's mountain.



The mountain is where we have a sacred encounter with the God of the Universe and the best version of ourselves.

Have you ever had such an experience, a mountain-top experience? Where you encountered God in a profound way?

Where did Jesus let you know that He was and is near you in your deepest, darkest experiences of life and faith?

This is part of the meaning of the four weeks of Advent. And it is different from the six weeks of Lent. Lent is a time for repentance. Advent is a time for preparation. How do we prepare? We beat our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks. We take our capacity for war and violence and transform it into a means of outreach, dialogue and assistance. As St. Paul says in today's Second Reading: we wake from our spiritual sleep, we throw off those sinful deeds of darkness and put on the armor of Christ.

Today's Gospel passages contains the controversial reference to what some Pentecostals and Fundamentalists call "the Rapture" and what led to the writing of books called the "Left Behind" series. Our Gospel passage is not proof of "the Rapture;" it is proof of life's random bad things that happen to good or innocent people.

The "coming of the Lord" which we anticipate during Advent has two rich meanings of the original Greek word, Parousia. Sounds like "Paris – See Ya!" It can mean the visitation of an important dignitary or politician, or it can mean God visiting a group of people with grace and gifts and salvation. Advent is a time to prepare for the coming of the Lord.

The coming of the Lord at Christmas, at the end of our earthly lives and at the end of the world. When will this happen? Jesus pretends He doesn't know, but He does – He's God! But He warns us: "Stay awake! Be ready, for you do not know at which hour or on which day your Lord will come."

We usually think of penance, prayer, fasting and almsgiving as something we do during Lent.

But after the November 8 passage of Proposal 3, Archbishop Vigneron asks us to do this during the first two weeks of Advent, beginning today. He

writes: “Abortion is now legal in Michigan at an unprecedented level, and millions of lives are at stake. We must pray and ask God for his mercy upon us for allowing this evil to happen in our state. **For this reason, I want to invite all the faithful to join me in the first two weeks of Advent, from November 27 to December 9, in doing penance, giving alms, praying, and fasting.** We must use these spiritual practices to make reparations for the great sin of abortion in our midst. [We are planning a Mass of Reparation for Wednesday, December 14 at 7 PM here at St. Martin de Porres. We invite our Family of Parishes to come.]

We also renew our commitment to accompanying women and families in need, with greater resolve than ever. This work is more critical now, as the unborn have been stripped of their basic right to life and their mothers face the harmful lie that the death of their children is a solution to their struggles. In response to the passing of Proposal 3, we must step forward with no judgment, open arms, and effective resources to help women reject the “solution” of death and empower them to choose life for their children.

In the Archdiocese of Detroit, we do this largely through [Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan](#), [Walking with Moms in Need \(WWMIN\)](#) and [Project Rachel](#). I urge you to please get involved in these ministries.

We will continue our efforts to build a culture of life in which abortion is unthinkable, all families receive the support they need, and the dignity of all people is recognized. We do this with confidence in the ultimate victory of Christ, Whose Resurrection to life has defeated the powers of death. St. Gianna Molla, the patroness of mothers, physicians, and unborn children, pray for us. Our Lady of Guadalupe, who carried the Savior in her womb, pray for us.”

So stay awake. Jesus is coming. Are you ready?

COME, LORD JESUS! AMEN!