

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Christmas Feast Year C 2021

Merry Christmas! But keep in mind it comes with a warning – everyone is always after a ‘perfect’ one- but what is that! Please be patient with yourselves and others. I know my mind the last several hours have been with ‘workers’ in the community and dislocated families this Christmas. Maybe because of sickness (still under pandemic shadow), because of recent death and loss, thinking of tornadoes and all affected, or because of too many needing things lately at the last minute or from our church’s serving the dinner the other night to Team Rubicon- the disaster relief team going every day into Mayfield to help-lot are not going home for christms), this Christmas has my mind/heart occupied with workers- our average frontline people, any store, the delivery folks-truck drivers, medical-nurses, health workers, even construction/repair techs; what happens without them? Of course, too, every Christmas has me thinking about the most memorable Christmases, and I have to say that the funnest or fondest memories I have, come from mishaps (certainly not perfect Christmases!) So with our most helpful folks (don’t know til we need them) and good memories I want to share two teaching moments I’ve picked up from Christmas Eve Past! And I am so thankful for the friends I worked with/met those days. The first came from my mom and dad’s store when I was young and brother and di were working one Christmas Eve, (which by the way- a lot o folks would come in and say ‘why are you here- you should be home with family-to which we would say =”you’re here- where would you go?” What could we get for you? So this one eve, a guy came in frantically saying “Bug spray? Where is your Raid-lack Flag—I’ve got an emergency! Kids are screaming wild, turns out his Christmas tree must have had millions of Praying mantis eggs waiting to hatch ‘on the night before Christmas when all through the house’ –bug bombs were waiting to explode----his tree was swimming with baby praying mantis bugs, but baby but big enough to panic the kids!” So we got him his bug killer fast in and out, for him to go take on that second mission at home!

The other fun and fond memory came when I was an early pastor and Christmas Eve morning , the decorating crew came over panicked to the house, telling me that the toilets were backing up in the basement (only bathrooms in the church building). What were we going to do about all Christmas masses and guest/visitors! I gotta say I thought of porta-poddies but which would be easier to get out a porat poddy delivery Christmams eve or a plumbe- but the best part is

that the toilets weren't backing up- they were leaking over the bowls, and flooding the basement floor (and a new word I learned from Glenn my friend the plumber) solids, solids were flooding the floor- we lay folks use another word for 'solids'). But Glenn a parishioner, Norb and I tackled it (long story short- like in the first example, thank God for convenience/grocery store clerks- so also thank God for plumbers or apprentice (if I can use that for me) plumbers to save the day-But also I learned a lot- Christmas went on with water flushed and drained staying in proper pipes that Christmas eve and next day. And I excitedly learned something of an old art of water witching (copper wires) to find the sewage drain line(there weren't any cleanouts!) But it is those workers I appreciate, that saved Christmas.

I find that to be a message for Christmas. God is celebrating 'greatness' but in the ordinary ways of daily life. Who is great in the Christmas Story? A faithful and devout mother and father, trying to meet their duty as new parents to be, but also as citizens of their land (Of all times to be made by government to go fill out census paperwork-have to travel to do it, it is when Mary is about to deliver her child-but they go and get it done!) Or How about those shepherds? On the one night that the sheep won't eat right, they are restless and straying more than usual, right when the shepherds get a moment to lay their head down, a spotlight and angel voices rouse them to go on an errand to meet their Savior over the hill in a temporary shelter and crib! Or maybe the creative innkeeper/room-cleaner who came up with the solution of finding an open barn/shed or corner pasture hedge row bush to cover this homeless expectant couple? Or how about the good neighbor or fellow traveler who offered extra clothes-food provisions when he saw this night is not like any other? I can imagine all kind of behind the scenes friends and helpers that made that first Christmas night the special one it is for us! And everything about it may not have gone down, as we would have sat back and planned it ahead of time! But that is God for us!

To reveal salvation to us, God enters into our world/lives as a simple little baby born in such an out of the way place And what a God we have, that he could have done it otherwise. For me, that is the angel part of Christmas night (It could have a stellar sky-opening firework show of God-Jesus dropping out of heaven— but it was simple baby birth- And even the angels-they had to start with pre-emptive - warning 'Don't fear don't fear-don't run away--this is good, we aren't the revelation of God, God has already slipped humbly into human nature without any flashy show- over at Bethlehem as a small new born child. Pope Francis

always reminds us that God came as a baby to invite us to come closer because everybody approaches a baby- Who doesn't come closer to check out the new baby's face, and congratulate the happy new parents! God wants us, invites us to approach! God's greatness comes to us in little simply humble ways- people doing their small, kind duties for others. Christmas celebrates the small, lifts the little, highlights the humble. So I think of our lowly frontline workers everywhere tonite

This point comes across in several ways in the gospel --- We have some worldly powerful people in the background, but they are not truly great in God's plan. There is Caesar-mighty Caesar who can make people go-travel, jump hoops and all red tape (But he is only a pawn in God's hand used to help Joseph/Mary get to Bethlehem-so that the Davidic prophecy would be fulfilled). There are those brilliant angels, but they are only radio announcements to direct the working shepherds in the right direction over to meet their Savior. The owner of the inns, enough said about them-that they lost what would have been their most historic customer because they weren't hospitable enough to 'make room' for a lowly couple happening to be visiting the area (must have All their Herodian Caesarian VIP clients got privileged priority over regular travelers (We don't know anything of their Vegas-style glamor- were their inns called the Sands or Mirage of Bethlehem?) No, God settled into our lives in a simple cave, a stable shed, free pasture, or cleft in hill. But that is the way that our God operates/works! Christmas teaches that true greatness reflected in Christ (He who said he came to serve not be served—Mark 10:45) is a humble lowly helpfulness not any show of force or self-promotion. It doesn't wear its own name on its sleeve, it doesn't seek recognition or reward outside of simply doing good for someone else because it is good! That's all. Christ's greatness puts all of itself in its work. So who are the heroes of Christmas night (very timely for us now) Who is truly great on Christmas eve-of course, the little baby-God Himself. And Christ's human parents providing as best they can in the circumstances they find themselves in. Another is the unknown kind neighbor who led Mary/Joseph to green pasture for animals and set a make shift home up wherever it was. Also, the shepherds who went to work that night out in the fields (maybe their own sheep-but maybe they were tending someone else' sheep-(I'm sure they were tempted to slip off to the inns-that would have been where the excitement food, drink, and fun would have been-(hot spot- if you have to stay up all night – the place to be would have been

around the inns not the field- but someone has to make the doughnuts!) (later we will hear about the dutiful wise men leaving the comfort of their routines and the faithful teachers of scripture on call around Herod's place) And more good simple folks just helping neighbors out with whatever their job was- I just heard this morning about the need for a locksmith!) These 'frontline workers' just doing their duty and keeping society moving and functioning; these are the truly great ones, that God choose to appear among. Here we go... thank a frontline worker today like a shepherd, like a farmer, like a fireman like a grocery worker like a trucker, like a delivery person.... That seems to be who Jesus was born among and it ends up as we follow his life , he lives among, works among, and himself glories in all through his life (himself being a carpenter). Christmas celebrates such little things, little ones and we thank God and them for it!

Examples of old testament surprises who is the truly greatest king ever in Hebrew history.... David and where did David get called from Receive his visitation.....

Recall that when the famous prophet showed up at Jesse's house, was David groomed and having his finest on to make a show, NO David was doing his duty out in the field 'doing what led/trained him to be the great leader he becomes known as 'he was away from the glamour out in the trench of a field rescuing a sheep, feeding one or simply watching them to keep them together.....

Or Recall example of

Christmas really does celebrate the simple, and elevate humbly, exalt the unexceptional.... who would have thought God-king of the universe showing up in little backwater Bethlehem, to traveling migrating parents-themselves with a questionable story of 'getting together' from the world's standards, who ended up giving birth to an only child out in-really God only knows where, and how would

have given 'hilldwelling' simpleton shepherds (not street smart enough to get out of duty-end up at rave inn back at town) the job of 'telling it on the mountains' and being the first outsiders to show up at God's Revelation-this is your God! At the heart of Christmas-that is the message. God doesn't want glamour, glitz, that glory of self-promotion, not God's greatness shows out in the daily duty of loving parents, doing what they need to, to survive, in the lives of low working class shepherds who know how to get by, who show up to work and get things done. Here we go... thank a forklift worker today like a shepherd, like a farmer, like a fireman, like a grocery worker like a trucker, like a delivery drop person.... That seems to be who Jesus was born among and ends up as we follow his life, living among, working among, and glorying in all through his life-death and in his return in spirit Pentecost and beyond..... himself as carpenter, and

God come have been revealed to us in a meteor shower or media show, but he was born in Bethlehem, diapered like us, to show us another way of living truly as God created us- selfless helpers to others who see their redemption fulfilled by the mingling of destinies and investing themselves in the love of others. We make it if he makes it, he puts himself in our hands, and so shows the way to peace being one of putting ourselves in God's hands,,,,,,
 God Himself takes on our human nature to show how doable

Done things that you thought in beginning "Oh I don't want to do that?": but you got into it and it turned out to be such a blessing...

Oh wonder if a lot of characters in Christmas story felt that way!

Imagine tonight, Mary and Joseph get word Oh of all times, Caesar wants a census, Okay let go

Or shepherds on the one night that the sheep are restless (all night they huddle turn in early, and go to sleep but oh not this night, the ever restless want to wonder a little and they hear a noise and say 'oh, night that be a wolf' let us go over there and find out.....

Well, that is the night that out of nowhere an angel shows and says this is it!