

2012

ADVENT TOGETHER SHARING CHRIST

IN THIS ISSUE:

Reflections and articles to help us through the Advent season with wisdom and with humor. Also a piece from America Magazine about Vatican II that offers some hope.

Pastor's Letter	Page 1
Associate's Letter	Page 2
December 8 th : The Immaculate Conception: Mary's Feast and Ours?	Page 3
Now, Yet Not Fully -Advent Theme Reflection	Page 5
Poem: God's Nature	Page 5
A Time to Harvest	Page 6
Poem Mosaic of the Nativity	Page 9
Educational Opportunities	Page 10
Bits O Humor	Page 10
Nine Tips for Surviving Advent	Page 11
October Parish Council Minutes	Page 12
Baby in the Manger - More than Meets the Eye	Page 16
Closing Thoughts	Page 19



CHECK OUT ST. V'S WEBSITE AT:
WWW.STVCHURCH.ORG

EDITED BY CHRIS MCCULLOUGH
CHRISM@STVCHURCH.ORG

VOLUME 33, NUMBER 3

Letter from the Pastor

November 16, 2012

Shalom!

You have received so many of these letters recently that you may be getting tired of hearing from me. But we really wanted to get this one out in time for the beginning of Advent.

There are many facets to Advent, and all of them are pertinent to us and our society more than most. Let's look at two of them.

First, Advent is a time of waiting. We don't like to wait. We are an impatient people. We don't mind doing it, even if the "it" in question involves a lot of hard work. But we want to do it now. Tempers flare when traffic gets tied up. People threaten politicians over waiting in line to vote. We are so much like our own kids, always asking, "Are we there yet?" This goes for religion too. We're all in favor of the Kingdom of God, but we want it now. Our God, on the other hand, seems to be a very patient God. After all, She's been waiting for 13.7 billion years for our universe to grow up. Maybe Advent can help us learn to be like Her.

Second, Advent is a time of hoping. We are afraid to hope. We are a cynical people. "Don't get your hopes up" has become a mantra for us. And with good reason. Other people, even people we love, our society, our leaders, our church, all have disappointed us so often that we are afraid to hope. After all, if you don't hope, you won't be disappointed. Our God, on the other hand, is a God of hope, a God who doesn't give up. A lesser God would have called off this universe a long time ago as a failed experiment and started over. But not our God. Our God goes on hoping in us even when experience suggests strongly that this hope will be in vain, again. Maybe Advent can help us to learn to hope in God the way God hopes in us.

Happy Advent!

Peace and Love,

Dick

Pastor

PASTORAL ASSOCIATE'S NOTES

November 19, 2012

Dear Fellow St. V's Parishioners,

Just a few weeks ago I was writing to you for an October issue. Our fall issues have been pushed together by extenuating circumstances. Now we move on to November. It is hard to believe that we are on the threshold of another year. As I write this we have yet to hit Thanksgiving, but as you read this, our stomachs are full from our feasting with family and friends of that celebration. And now we turn our faces to new beginnings. The season of Advent starts us anew on our liturgical journey in the Gospel of Luke. Included in this issue are pieces that I hope will serve as reflective tools to help us all prepare our hearts and minds for what follows.

Another wonderful addition to our Advent preparations for this year is an advent booklet of reflections. Generated primarily by the contributions of our own parishioners, the booklet is made up of reflections for each day. These reflections will be posted on our web-site, daily, for your prayer and reflection. It is also available in non-virtual (printed) copies in the back of church for those who wish to have one. I am grateful for the way our parishioners have responded to my request for reflections to make this reflective guide possible.

Many of you sat for photos for our photo directory. It will be good to have an up to date version. It has been a decade since our last one. We are encouraging everyone to go to our webpage and update your registration information. If you have not, I would invite you to take a moment to do so.

Please note that our third lecture in our Vatican II lecture series with Sr. Mary Collins has been postponed. Sr. Mary fell and broke her hip and so cannot travel to be with us. We will reschedule her lecture for some time in the later winter – spring. We will keep you posted on the web-site, bulletin and here in TSC. I am hopeful that you were able to take advantage of our series.

It is my hope and my wish that this Advent season provides for you an opportunity to move closer to the Lord as you prepare for the celebration of his coming on Christmas day. If you can join us for our 7:15 PM Christmas Eve Mass with the Christmas pageant featuring our children, it would be great to have you with us. May all of your holiday celebrations be blessed with the richness of our loving God and savior Jesus Christ – the incarnate one.

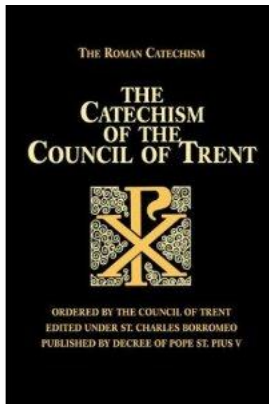
Peace,

Chris

DECEMBER 8TH: THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION: MARY'S FEAST AND OURS?

BY AUDREY ROGERS

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Church declared that Mary was conceived without sin thus making it official Church doctrine. Yet, it was not a new belief. Although unknown to the Church Fathers, soon thereafter people came to believe that it would not be fitting for the creature whom



would bear the Son of God to be touched by the original sin of disobedience, the legacy of her first parents, Adam and Eve. Beginning in the ninth century, local churches began to celebrate the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception. The Council of Trent in the middle of the 16th century deliberately excluded Mary from its decree on original sin and proclaimed that she was free from sin her entire life.

Historically, the dominant Western theology has been salvation-focused. Because of its original sin, humankind is broken, sinful, lost. There is a chasm between God and creature that only God can bridge with grace whose function is healing and restoration. The initiative is exclusively God's, implemented by some plan

unknowable to us. Some are saved, others not. It is more than interesting that in the middle of this focus on the fallen state of a lost humanity, there emerged in the pews a small and persistent belief that the God who would become incarnate was bigger, more generous, and more loving than the one being portrayed. People seemed to believe despite being told that we were all damned from birth without baptism's water, that perhaps, at least once in our history, this kind of generous God could create one human immediately open to love and grace. Perhaps just once a single person could retain the divine spark in her soul from the moment of conception and could be a symbol of hope for us all. Mary.

When the Immaculate Conception was declared a tenet of faith in 1854, the Church still adhered to the historical accuracy of Genesis and Augustine's teaching based on it. But now, a century and a half later, we understand Genesis better. What to make of this feast day then? Particularly since the American bishops dedicated our country to her patronage as the Immaculate Conception in 1846? Is it as simple as '*no original sin*' equals '*no immaculate conception*'?

We need new eyes. The feast is in fact more insightful than its original premise would posit. Genesis is not a historical fact, but a deeper truth. And we have come to know that original sin has nothing to do with the disobedience of eating an apple, but the more profound reality of the human condition. We are all fueled by the delusion that we are separate from God and we all eat the apple to become like God, to be in control, and to have no need of God: this is our original sin. It leads to all human evil. As Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out: *The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of Christian faith.*

In the twentieth century, three classic Christian beliefs again converged: all creation came from God and will return to God, God wills the salvation of all, and the nature of grace is superabundance. These beliefs had converged before in the thought of Aquinas. And although this theology continues to underscore that created human nature has no inherent right to God's grace, it celebrates a God who does not stand on ceremony safeguarding divine privilege. It says that God has graciously added the supernatural capacity to receive love and grace to our basic human nature. It says we are all created open to grace. It says we can all be like Mary.

But how? The mystics tell us the stance of creation in relation to God must be a feminine one. Creation and creatures receive God. There is no room for the masculine characteristics of action, control, power. Our mindset must be Mary's fiat: *let it be done to me*. It was the perfection of the human response to God and foreshadowed the mindset of Jesus as he faced his fate on the cross. This, then, is at the heart of this feast and why it should be embraced for it not only grew out of a basic human understanding of our gifted capacity for the divine but illuminated the path of how to develop that capacity.



Image: *The Annunciation* by John William Waterhouse www.jwwaterhouse.com

Finally, this new understanding of the feast presents a delightful irony as this is the title of Mary under whose patronage the United States has been placed. We have had at least one war per generation for over a century, choosing to solve our issues with force of arms in order to control and exert power. This feast of our patron celebrates a different path and there is no time in our history when we have needed its wisdom more.

NOW, YET NOT FULLY

Advent Theme Reflection

Advent is the season when the Church community quiets down in expectant hope to welcome the Light of the World. We should not be satisfied with the story of a small newborn kept warm by a young mother in a Bethlehem stable - as endearing as that story is. We should not be concerned with celebrating a birthday, a historical event. Anyone who gets focused on the story misses the living element in its message. In Christmas, as in all Christian feasts, we see realized the unfolding of eternity in time.

Like the acorn that holds the promise of the oak tree, God's kingdom is truly now yet not fully. God broke into human history in Jesus to affirm the continuing intimate accessibility of the Divine and to reassure us that the kingdom we hope for and dream about in our homesick hearts is in fact already among us although its fullest expression lay in the future when all creation will rest in God.

Join us in the expectant silence of the heart after we share the Eucharist during Advent.

GOD'S NATURE

SOMETIMES WE THINK WHAT WE ARE SAYING ABOUT GOD
IS TRUE WHEN IN FACT
IT IS NOT.

IT WOULD SEEM OF VALUE TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN WHAT IS
GOD'S NATURE AND WHAT IS FALSE ABOUT LOVE.

I HAVE COME TO LEARN THAT THE TRUTH NEVER HARMS
OR FRIGHTENS.

I HAVE COME TO LEARN THAT
GOD'S COMPASSION AND LIGHT CAN NEVER BE LIMITED;

THUS ANY GOD WHO COULD CONDEMN IS
NOT A GOD AT ALL

BUT SOME DISTURBING IMAGE IN THE
MIND OF A
CHILD

WE BEST IGNORE, UNTIL WE
CAN CURE THE DARK.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

A TIME TO HARVEST

The Second Vatican Council was the sower. Now we are the laborers.

By Ladislas Orsy | OCTOBER 8, 2012

The message of this article is simple: the Second Vatican Council lives, and we are bound to sustain it. The council lives because the impulse of the Spirit that “caused” the council continues in the community at large. The Catholics of today, therefore, ought to call out daily *Adsumus*, that is, “We are present,” just as the bishops in St. Peter’s Basilica cried out at the beginning of every session. The invocation indicates the willingness of the community to be open to the Spirit and to do the work of the Spirit.

Such an approach relies on the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” which affirms that “the holy people of God...anointed by the holy One...[remains] attached unfailingly to the faith, penetrates it more deeply through correct judgment and applies it more fully to life” (No. 12). An equivalent formulation could be: God’s people own the Tradition, are unfailingly faithful to it and have the capacity to order their lives accordingly. By a subtle divine law, the faithful of today are the legitimate heirs of the council. If so, they are bound to continue the council’s quest for a fuller understanding of faith and to work for the renewal of the church in a practical way.

To better understand our situation today, it may be helpful to look at it through the lens of the biblical parable of the sower (Mk 4:1-9). The council was the sower; now we are the laborers in God’s own household. Fifty years later in God’s plantation, we are surrounded by varied scenery. Here and there seeds contend with rocks and struggle to strike roots. In other places tender plants push for space to expand; elsewhere, growing trees reach for nourishing sun and warm rain. It is a rich ambiance, no doubt, and an intricate one; the multiplicity of the creatures on the ground demands alert caretakers with wisdom and expertise. Fifty years after the council, our destiny and obligation are to take stock of what we inherited from the council and to continue its work, not as a council in the technical sense but as a synod, *synodos*, in the old Christian sense—the community of those who are marching on the same road toward the same promised land.

THE LONG MARCH

At the beginning of the postconciliar years, the future looked bright and promising. On Dec. 8, 1965, Yves Congar, O.P., one of the leading theologians at the council, wrote in his diary: “Today the church is sent into the world, to the nations, to the peoples. It is a beginning, not in Jerusalem but in Rome. The Council will explode in the world. For the Council, this is the day of Pentecost foretold by John XXIII” (author’s translation). Father Congar’s imagination was inspired by the history of the first century. Within a few decades after the Pentecost in Jerusalem, the Gospel message exploded far and wide in the Roman Empire.

Today many thoughtful people see something else: the council’s impact is waning. What was once celebrated as a momentous event is now redefined as insignificant. We hear their questions no matter where we turn. Here are some examples:

What happened to the liturgy? The council intended to renew it by reaching back to old and rich traditions, but in place of embracing the conciliar initiative, we see a return to the Tridentine form. In many locations, the people must contend with rival celebrations at the same time and place. This is something unheard of in Catholic history. The sacrament of unity is dividing communities.

What happened to synodality? The Orthodox churches, our sister churches, are sending messages that no unity between East and West is conceivable unless we Westerners are willing to return to an ancient tradition of government where synodality and primacy operate in a balanced harmony. Surely this is not a demand that would “smell” of schism or heresy. Why then not seek unity—even at the price of our nonessential practices?

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the council, why are we mandated and urged to study the Catechism of the Catholic Church and not the documents of the Second Vatican Council? The catechism deserves respect; each part of it has the authority of the source of that part. But why are we spending our time and energy on the disparate sources of the catechism when we could study (should study) the proclamations of a council that—as the church teaches—was assisted by the Spirit?

These questions are legitimate, but even if the questions were incorrect, they deserve a considered response. Behind the inquiry, an honest conscience may be searching for the light of truth.

Between the conflicting moods (exulting hope and gloomy depression), let us return to the parable of the sower. It should help us gain a more wholesome perspective. Father Congar sensed the divine force in the seed, but he forgot that the soil could be rocky and unreceptive even in God's field, the church. Nor did he think of the enemies who may sow weeds among the wheat (Mt 13:24-30). Nonetheless, in substance he was right. The word of God as it was proclaimed at the council was full of restless energy. Eventually it will explode, in God's own appointed time.

Those who today are depressed by the slow pace of renewal and are asking "What happened?" may need to recall that within the kingdom, human measures do not work well. The struggle of the truth for recognition may be slow by our measure, and it may try our patience. Good ideas, however, are resilient and assertive; when expelled they tend to return. And the impulse of the Spirit cannot be halted.

Today, as laborers on God's own estate, we find ourselves in vastly different circumstances from those of 50 years ago. We are able to assess to a fair extent how far the implementation of the council has progressed; we can make some calculations as to what more is needed. We are called to cooperate. Of course, as we enter into such a holy adventure, we should be aware that we may not see the result of our work. We may not be among the harvesters. That, however, is not the issue. The issue is in fulfilling our own modest role in a divine play in our allotted time; we must promote a good cause according to our capacity and with the ways and means available to us.

NEXT STEPS

The question we need to ask is: *What should we do to help the council's work flourish and expand?* We should promote the right environment for healthy developments, and we should press for some basic improvements in the church's constitutional operations and structures. Much that follows here can be done within the existing laws. For the right environment we need trust in the Spirit, the capacity for friendly debates and an air of freedom in God's field. Without trust in the Holy Spirit and each other our efforts would be in vain. The council was born from the trust of Pope John XXIII in the Holy Spirit. He said so from the first announcement of the council, and later he confirmed it by talking about a new Pentecost. He was aware that the Spirit alone had the intelligence and the strength to hold such an assembly together and to make it productive. Later, when the participants rejected most of the preparatory work over which he presided, he trusted the bishops (and rejoiced). He sensed the Spirit behind their movements, and he kept learning from them while he guided them.

Friendly debates only flourish in an atmosphere of trust. Without friendly debates, there is little progress in the understanding of faith. In recent decades, we all have become familiar with the utterly serious lecturer in theology who delivers the last word on a delicate matter. But a solitary thinker can hardly be a Christian theologian. The reason is that God imparted his revelation to a community; no one single person was ever privileged to hold it all in his or her own memory. Truth reveals itself through conversations in the community.

Meaningful conversations or debates can take place only in an atmosphere of freedom. When fear takes possession of human minds and hearts, the dignity of the persons is diminished. They will be reluctant to talk about their struggles and their combat with good and evil spirits. They become muted or, worse, they hide behind double talk. When such a camouflage happens in a community, friendly debates become extinct. Once

we achieve a climate of trust in the divine and we have cheerful disputations among ourselves in an atmosphere of freedom, then we can better focus on some of the pressing needs of the church in the coming decades. Such needs are: a more intense awareness among the bishops of their own calling, a new way of doing justice and a more intense participation of the baptized but not ordained in the government of the community.

Concerning bishops. The constitution on the church contains a sentence that has been commented on abundantly in the theoretical order, but in the practical order does not seem to have had much impact. It reads, “Episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college” (No. 21, translation from the Vatican Web site).

In ordinary language, this means that the Holy Spirit is the one who (through the sacrament of orders) gives the bishop the power to shepherd his flock; then, afterwards, the pope assigns the person so endowed to a particular diocese. It follows that every bishop, first and foremost, is accountable to the Holy Spirit. This hierarchy lays the ground for a healthy equilibrium in the administration of the community; the pope is the principle of unity and the bishops are the representatives of diversity. No bishop in his diocese can ever be a mere executive officer of the pope. No pope can function well without the help of his brother bishops.

Concerning the administration of justice. The 1983 edition of the Code of Canon law carefully enumerates and solemnly affirms the rights of the faithful. But as lawyers well know, no declaration of rights is worth much unless it is backed up by courts that have the necessary autonomy to operate, are seen to do justice, work without undue delays and have the means to enforce their judgment. Admittedly, we have ecclesiastical courts, but there is need for much improvement in the administration of justice.

Concerning the baptized, nonordained faithful. Last, but truly not least, the church needs to bring the laity into its organizational and governmental operations far more than it has done thus far. Among them immense and diverse gifts of nature and grace are lying fallow and so do not benefit the Christian community. This is all because of a doctrinal position taken unnecessarily by the drafters of Canon 129: “Lay members of the Christian faithful can cooperate in the exercise of the power [of governance] according to the norm of law.” Note the canon says “cooperate,” not “participate”—a world of difference. The former calls for passive obedience, the latter for active contribution. This view has no justification in tradition beyond the basic rule that a layperson cannot participate in the sacramental power given by ordination. For many activities in church government no anointing is necessary. Radical exclusion of the laity is a novelty in the church’s 2,000 years of history. The best witnesses against the new rule would be the Byzantine emperors and empresses (surely not ordained); they called all the ecumenical councils in the first millennium. This was participation in church governance if ever there was any.

Fifty years after the council, the point of this article is not so much to celebrate the past as to look to the future. Its point of departure is in the diagnosis: the council lives and its vital signs can be seen all around. The task of our generation is to labor in the field of God, nourish the plants and support the fledgling trees. As for the rest? Let us leave it to the Lord of the harvest.

LADISLAS ORSY, S.J., author of *Receiving the Council* (Liturgical Press, 2009), teaches at Georgetown University Law Center. During the council he was a professor at the Gregorian University in Rome and the official expert for the Archbishop of Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe); he also had the opportunity to participate in many conversations and debates among the council fathers.

Reprinted from America October 8, 2012 with permission of America Press, Inc., 2012. All rights reserved. For subscription information, call 1-800-627-9533 or visit www.americamagazine.org.

MOSAIC OF THE NATIVITY

On the domed ceiling God is thinking:

I made them my joy,
And everything else I created
I made to bless them.
But see what they do!
I know their hearts
And arguments:

“We’re descended from
Cain. Evil is nothing new,
So what does it matter now
If we shell the infirmity,
And the well where the fearful
And rash alike must
Come for water?”

God think Mary into being.
Suspended at the apogee
Of the golden dome,
She curls in a brown pod,
And inside her the mind
Of Christ, cloaked in blood,
Lodges and begins to grow.

-By Jane Kenyon

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

VATICAN II- LECTURE SERIES: IN CELEBRATION OF 50 YEARS

- POSTPONED! Lecture III:** *On The Liturgy* Monday, Dec 10 7:30 -9:00 PM
 Presenter: Sr. Mary Collins, OSB at Corpus Christi – 1316 W. Mt. Royal Ave
- Lecture IV:** *On The Church* Monday, April 22 7:30 -9:00 PM
 Presenter: Dolores Leckey at St. Alphonsus – 114 W. Saratoga St.
- Lecture V:** *Vatican II: Then and Now* Tuesday, May 28 7:30 -9:00 PM
 Presenter: Rosann Catalano, PhD at The Basilica – 409 Cathedral St.

All Lectures will occur in the Church sanctuaries with a reception to follow each of the presentations.

ADVENT DAY OF RECOLLECTION

I AM SOMEONE, WHO IS ALSO PART OF SOMETHING

PRESENTER: ANNE MAURA ENGLISH

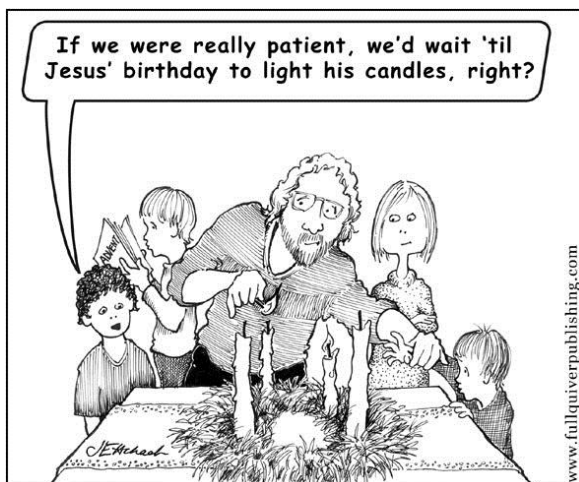
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1 - 9:30 AM TO 1:30 PM - RECTORY BASEMENT CLASSROOM

RSVP to Chris McCullough at chrism@stvchurch.org or 410-962-5078

Once again we enter the cycle of the Liturgical Year: Advent, Christmas, the in-breaking of the Kingdom, Lent, Holy Week, Pentecost, the unfolding, the End-time.

How might our vision of God, of spirituality, of ourselves be transformed by a Sunday-fueled spirituality grounded in the Liturgical Year? What does MY story have to do with the Liturgical Year?

BITS O HUMOR



NINE TIPS TO HELP YOU SURVIVE ADVENT

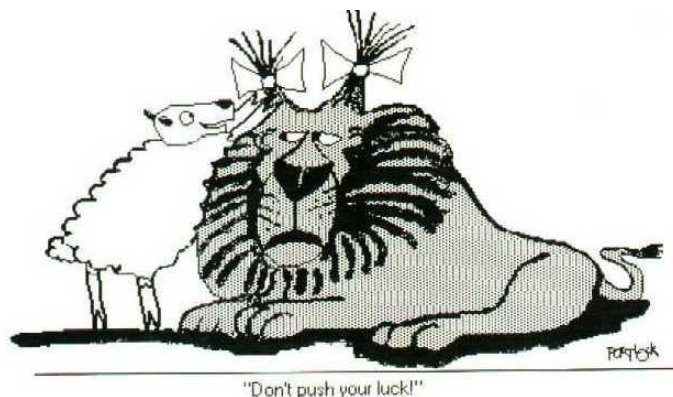
by Ed Spivey Jr. of Sojourners Magazine

Advent—the four weeks leading up to Christmas—is an important time of waiting and preparation for Christians around the globe. Here are a few tips to help you make it through the season:

1. Shop early and often. (And don't forget the pepper spray. Sadly, there may be moments when another shopper wrongly believes that, just because he's at the front of the line, you don't have the right to shove your way through to the sale table.)
2. Make the advent wreath a centerpiece of the family's weekly meditation on the season. (And remember, don't light the purple candle. That's for Santa to light on Christmas Eve.)
3. Since Advent is a time of waiting, try to schedule service appointments for the weeks before Christmas. Taking off a half-day of work for the cable guy or the plumber is much less annoying when there's a religious connection. (And if you work for a Christian organization, it doesn't come off vacation time.)
4. Advent is a time of giving, so make sure you find out the identity of your office Secret Santa and then drop hints for gifts that you would most appreciate. (And remind them that thrift stores are not where Jesus would shop.)
5. Since Advent is often a time of welcoming relatives to the home, make an effort to include them in the family Christmas traditions they missed out on last year, such as loading the dishwasher, making their own beds, and picking up after themselves.
6. Decorating the outside of your house is a great way to show the neighbors how important Advent is to your family. And remember, it's not a competition to see whose house is the best on your block, although if your lights are not bright enough to interfere with the navigation of passing jetliners then, frankly, you're just not feeling the true Christmas spirit.
7. An Advent Calendar is a great way to remember Christmas each day of the season, especially if there is chocolate behind every door. Which is why Advent at our house usually lasts about three days. (Suggestion: buy an Advent Calendar for every day of Advent, that way you don't run out of chocolate as quickly.)
8. Years ago I gave my mother a late birthday present which she refused to accept until I said, "okay, then let's just call it a pre-Christmas gift." The fact that Hallmark never got a hold of this idea is one of the enduring blessings of the Advent season. Join with me in celebrating this.
9. Our family has for years attended midnight mass on Christmas Eve at the Capuchin Monastery in Washington, D.C. We do this for three reasons: great singing, a short liturgy, and a long buffet. (We're talking shrimp the size of drumsticks!) We encourage you to find your own meaningful place of worship to celebrate Christmas, although not the Capuchins in D.C. because there's not enough shrimp to go around. Sorry.

Used with permission from Ed Spivey Jr., art director and humor columnist for Sojourners magazine.

<http://sojo.net/blogs/2011/11/29/nine-tips-help-you-survive-advent>



**Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting
of St. Vincent de Paul Church
October 9th, 2012**

The meeting was brought to order by the Council President, Jim Casey, at 7:34pm. Prayer was offered by Pete McDowell. In attendance: Fr. Richard Lawrence (Pastor) Christopher McCullough (Pastoral Associate), Laureen Brunelli (Chair C&O Committee), Pat Ball (Chair Facilities Committee), Peggy Meyer (Chair, Social Action Committee), Peter McDowell (11:45 Rep.), Rosie Graf (9:30pm Mass Rep.), Sara Kelley (9:30 Mass Rep.), Audrey Rogers (Liturgy Committee Chair), Maureen Fitzsimmons (Finance Committee Chair), Jack Bonner (9:30 Mass Rep) John Kober (7:15 Mass Rep) and Graham Yearley (Corporator & 12:15 Mass Rep.). Absent with excuse: Anne Marie Freeburger (Corporator).

Pastor's Report

1. Air conditioning system is working. One of the windows in the church has been restored, two windows await stained glass being put back in and two others are being worked on. The Homecoming celebration was well done and well attended.
2. Fr. Lawrence will preach on two issues being voted on in November's election: The Dream Act (Question 4 on the ballot) on October 20 and 21st and the Equal Marriage Act (Question 6) on October 27 and 28. One homily will address the issue of civic responsibility and conscience formation in the light of the appointed scripture readings. Fr. Lawrence then outlined the main points of his homilies on the Dream Act and the Marriage Act. Both homilies will appear on St. Vincent's website.
3. Fr. Lawrence wrote to the Archbishop ten days ago outlining his proposed plans for the future when he retires from administering St. Vincent de Paul full time in June of 2013. He has not yet heard back from the Archbishop. The proposal will include job title changes for Fr. Lawrence to "Senior Priest" and Chris McCullough to Parish Life Director (or some form of that) if the archbishop agrees to the plan.

Finance Report

1. It may appear on the balance sheet that donations are down, but the expectation of major gifts in the next months will assure that the donations will equal out over the course of the fiscal year and meet the projected amounts.
2. \$500 was placed in the Communications and Outreach Committee's account to pay for an advertisement in the National Catholic Reporter's special issue on the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II. This advertisement provided contact information for our parish community to take advantage of an article authored by Fr. Lawrence in the same edition.
3. Audrey Rogers asked for clarification for committee authority when funding has been budgeted for committee activities; specifically whether these expenditures needed Council approval or whether this spending was delegated to the committee. Jim Casey said he thought such expenditures if reasonable could be made at the discretion of the committee and need not come to council.

Youth Ministry and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps

Chris McCullough asked for the Council's approval to explore St. Vincent's applying for a Jesuit Volunteer Corps volunteer to head up creating a Youth Ministry here. The understanding of youth stretches to include from middle schoolers to college graduates. The volunteer will create opportunities for service and social activities. The position will begin in August of 2013. There is a cost of \$13,000 a year to cover the living expenses for the volunteer. It is possible that one of our "cluster churches" may become interested in partnering with us and, if so, the expense could be shared. The likely church to work with is Corpus Christi. Sara Kelley, who worked for the Jesuit Volunteer Corps offered her help to Chris McCullough in making out the application. Chris McCullough promised to bring a formal proposal to the Council next month.

Committee Chairs Burning Out

This issue was discussed at length at the last meeting. Rosie Graff and others reported on the progress made on the initiatives that came out of that discussion.

a.) The new Photo Parish Directory: the dates of November 7th, 8th 9th and 10th are set up as the days for photographing parishioners at the parish. A sign-up sheet will be sent out electronically in the next few days. Photos and information can be added by individuals to their profile electronically once the system is set up.

b.) Re-Registration for Parish: A link to on-line registration form will be sent out to the entire parish; the form has places to indicate your interests and talents which will be forwarded to the chairs of the appropriate committees or special groups.

Announcements in Advent

The council gave its approval to the proposal of the Liturgy Committee to suspend announcements during the 9:30 Mass for the Advent season. Announcements can be made prior to Mass.

Committee Reports:

Liturgy Committee Report (submitted by Audrey Rogers, Chair)

[A] 2012-13 Goals

The committee discussed & affirmed the proposed goals, adding another one related to the new Baptismal Font.

- *Enhance the conscious participation of the congregation in liturgies*
*Evaluate and propose rituals and prayers
- *Inaugurate Eucharistic study and renewal*
*Build on momentum from retreat
*Coordinate with E&E Committee
- *Review all liturgical ministries for training and guidance needs (Don Henderson has volunteered to conduct lector voice training)*
- *Reinvigorate committee membership*
*Publicize, reach out, engage
- *Plan a program of Baptismal exegesis to enhance the consecration of the to-be-installed Baptismal Font. (The expected installation is scheduled to be completed for the Easter Vigil; the program would occur during the Easter season in April; Easter is March 31.)*

[B] Retreat Recommendations

The committee accepted the recommendations from the summer retreat including no announcements during Mass after Communion for both Advent and Lent. Announcements will occur prior to Mass. This decision has been sent to the Council for approval. The theme for the 2013 and 2014 Summer Series will be on the *Dimensions of the Eucharist*.

[C] Distribution of the Eucharist at 9:30 Mass

The committee discussed some issues with Eucharistic distribution and decided on content that should be made available to ministers in the form of guidance. It was also noted that the assignment schedules should be on the website with all other schedules. This effort will be coordinated with Barbara Hodnett who has responsibility for the Eucharistic Ministers.

[D] Liturgy Resources on Parish Website Action

This item has been on the last two agendas with little progress. Chris volunteered to identify some sites for the committee to review for posting.

[E] Advent Planning

- Cycle C: Gospel of Luke. The committee came to consensus on theme: **'Now yet not fully.'**
- All of the assorted Advent activities for which this committee is responsible (wreath, candle-bearing ritual, reconciliation, lessons and carols, bulletin inserts, website reflections) were discussed with most assigned.
- Important Dates
 1. Day of the Dead: All Saints/All Souls November 3-4, 2012

2. Reconciliation at St. Vincent on Wednesday December 12, 7:30-8:30 PM.
3. Lessons and Carols at St. Vincent's on Sunday, December 16, 7:30-9:00 PM.

Last meeting was held on September 23, 2012.

Communications and Outreach Committee (submitted by Laureen Brunelli, Chair)

Web/Electronic Communications

[1] St. V's e-mail accounts

We discussed how to keep these website email accounts current and what mechanism would be optimal in accomplishing that since C+O has responsibility for updating website pages, the website e-mail accounts, the bulletin contact table, and the photo gallery in the Gathering Space. A change in our charter will be made to reflect this.

[2] St. V's PayPal account is now available. It will be added to: the current *The Resource Exchange* page (accessed through Quick Links); and (2) the *Secure their Future* campaign page which is not yet published.

Parishioner Engagement

Both Parish Re-registration and the production of a new Parish Directory were discussed at the last Parish Council meeting. Rosie Graf clarified that this was to be a combined project under the C+O Committee (to which she is a very welcome new member!) and for which she (with Barbara Bowles' assistance) will take the lead. The next steps were discussed. Rosie is exploring if the offered November 7-10 timeframe for photography is still available.

NCR Ad

Fr. Dick's essay on Vatican II at the parish level that will appear in the *National Catholic Reporter* on October 10 along with a paid ad inviting readers to St V's via the website. We have produced parish-specific information for the Homepage particularly for the few weeks surrounding the advertisement.

Other Business:

Homecoming: The announcement of Homecoming appeared in the September 20 issue of the Catholic Review. The publicity campaign for The Resource Exchange is underway. The invitation letters to the pastors of the Catholic Churches of the Central City were produced, signed by the pastor and sent on September 15. The text for the Archdiocesan electronic bulletin has been produced and approved by the TRE team. It awaits only the PayPal button on the TRE web page.

Goals for the Coming Year: Laureen Brunelli, Chair, pointed out that this was to have been the year in which C+O began to focus on outreach. However, with the new effort to produce a directory and re-register all parishioners to more fully engage members in the mission of our parish, we have further internal work to pursue. One outreach item, though, still requires attention: **Facebook**. Laureen maintains that the launching of a Facebook account should be done carefully with responsible 'managing' person(s) recruited and kept well-informed. We should also set goals for its evaluation as an outreach tool and measure its performance. Since time was short at this point, Laureen tabled this discussion until next meeting.

2012-2013 C+O Committee Meetings Dates: All meetings are on Sundays after the 9:30 Mass: December 9, 2012; March 10, 2013; June 2, 2013

Social Action Committee (report by Peggy Meyers, Chair)

Friday dinner: We continue to serve 150-250 guests each Friday evening.

Recycling Day: The company is working through management changes and we are awaiting the date.

Emergency Services: Monthly gave out groceries to about 100 families and spent about \$400 in September. The men's program gave clothing to 56 men and spent about \$650.

Habitat: United Churches had a build on September 29th and we had 5 volunteers.

Our Daily Bread: We continue to chop vegetables every other Sunday.

Jonestown Planning Council: We discussed a development plan for the neighborhood and asking MICA graduates to design signage. The Hendler Creamery building/lot auction was moved to 10/18. Ronald McDonald House and a few others submitted bids. The Jewish Museum rep at 15 Lloyd Street discussed their vision for increasing visitors. Any increased traffic to the neighborhood is good for all. On 10/21 from 10-5 they'll have a free event with a Gefelte Fest cook-off outdoors and guests like Aquarium reps talking about sustainable fish. They will team up soon with the Reginald F. Lewis Museum (Skipp Sanders) for an exhibit on Heroes, Real and Imagined to include illustrations from comic book heroes. Buses will take students to both museums.

The Resource Exchange: We had 3 moves in September and provided furniture and starter kits as we unpacked our kits and helped them make their apartment a home. We also picked up a lot of furniture and organized our starter kit area. Thanks to Chris for the shelving. C & O committee helped get our message out to our cluster parishes through bulletin announcements. Thank you!

Social Action Report to Parish Council (items added at Parish Council Meeting)

1. Peggy Meyers had pamphlets explaining the Dream Act referendum and distributed them.
2. The metro Balt/Washington regional meeting Pax Christi was held here at St. V's last Saturday.
3. The Resource Exchange received a "Partners in Excellence" award from Health Care for the Homeless for their work setting up housing for the homeless.

The Peace and Justice Group Report

1. Through BRIDGE we are working with a Job Opportunities Task Force, part of the Fair
2. Development Coalition, to come up with job applicants to test it. See Chris if you know of a parishioner.
3. BRIDGE will celebrate their 10th anniversary 11/2 6-10 p.m. at Coppin State University.
4. We are researching the advantages of Sungevity renting space on one's roof for solar panels and will share with parishioners when complete.
5. We will work with Unite Here Local 7 as they demand a fair process for representation at the Hyatt Regency Baltimore.

Old Business

The council discussed a letter sent by Jim Lochner, a former Parish Council member, expressing some concerns of parishioners about the Campaign for SS. James and John. The principal concern was that some people felt the campaign had been focused on large donations and that had discouraged small donations. In his letter, Jim had offered to do an analysis of the number of donors and the amounts that had been donated.

Fr. Lawrence said that analysis had been done and offered these figures. The total raised so far is \$567,990 by 87 donors. There are four gifts of \$25,000 and over; 24 donations between \$12,500 and to \$24,500; 10 donations between \$5,000 and \$12,499; 23 donations for \$1,000 to \$4,999; and 26 gifts of less than \$1,000. Fr. Lawrence said the initial campaign was soon be over, but we could have one special collection for SS. James and John each year for the next four years, so people, who had not be able to donate in the original campaign, could make gifts. We have exceeded by a wide margin the Archdiocese's estimate of what could be raised, but it is still felt that there should be wide support of members of the parish for this cause as this campaign represents our parish's portion of the five year capital campaign of the Archdiocese.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30pm with the recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Minutes submitted by the secretary of the Parish Council,

Graham G. Yearley

THE BABY IN THE MANGER

—MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

BY ANNE MAURA

For many of us, the Christmas manger scene makes it easy to reflect on how much God loves us and is willing to do to reach out to us. This is “Emmanuel”—the Hebrew for “God with us.” For it is a dogma of our faith that the baby in the manger, Jesus of Nazareth, was not just truly human, but also truly God—the Second Person of the Trinity. Theology uses the term *Incarnation*, in-fleshment, for this mystery. John’s gospel proclaims it as “the Word became flesh.” The following reflections are aimed at taking us a little deeper into that mystery. What does it mean that the Word became flesh? What did that mean for Jesus, the human Jesus? Can we catch a glimpse of what that experience was like for him? And what does that, in turn, tell us—tell me—what it means to be *me*?

The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer formerly in use says Jesus was “a man like us in all things, except sin.” Vatican II’s document *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World)* says, “He worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind; acted by human choice, and loved with a human heart.” (par.22) What did that mean for Jesus? What was that like for him?

Well, for a start it means the well-meaning descriptions of Jesus as God-in-disguise or God-playing-a-part are wrong. As moving as Christmas carols can be, there is no “little Lord Jesus.” The baby Jesus is not lying there in the manger reflecting on his mission, savoring the Beatific Vision, and looking forward to blessing the shepherds. He’s not pretending to be a baby. Of course our Christmas card scenes don’t help us grasp that. What they give us is a small four-year-old smiling from a manger. Real human babies a few hours—even a few days—old don’t look like that. They’re very wrinkled, still very curled up, incredibly fragile, their amazingly thin arms and legs looking as if they’re barely attached to the tiny torso. They mostly sleep. Even had there been an actual “drummer boy” in the stable, the infant wouldn’t have smiled at him. Newborns can’t see that far and their smiles are not responses to external stimuli.

What was Jesus’ experience of the mystery of who he was? That question can only be answered by asking the same questions about those to whom he was “like . . . in all things.” When do human beings develop a sense of themselves? When did you begin to realize in what ways you were different from other people? When did you come to understand who you are? Is that process finished, or is it still unfolding? Have you ever heard someone say—have you ever said yourself—“I never realized I could . . .”

Reflection on questions like those led in the early 20th century to an entire body of religious writing on the “consciousness of Jesus”—but not to any easy answers. At some point in his life, Jesus seems to have realized that his experience of God was different—but if he was truly human then he had to accept that on faith, accept that his experience was real and valid. Jesus could fully incarnate his divine nature, work miracles, speak of his oneness with his Abba because he truly accepted his divinity, fully opened himself to that nature. And it was in his total trust in that (even to the cross), in his full

acceptance of the gift of God's personhood to him, in his willingness to open his humanity fully to union with God that all of humanity's initial and ongoing rejection of God was historically and irrevocably reversed: "redeemed."

Again, there is no simple way to explain this. We're not talking the Incredible Hulk, or even Spiderman. Jesus' experience was not, "OK, now the 'divine me' is taking over." His miracles, his sense of Oneness with his Abba, The theologians of the 4th century wrestled with inventing a phrase that would express the reality of Jesus' identity. They came up with *hypostatic union* Ungainly and impersonal as the phrase may seem it aims to defend the essential integrity, the seamlessness of Jesus' identity and experience: two natures, one person. Jesus experienced himself as himself: "This is me, this is who I am" and gradually came to a greater realization of who/Who he truly was.

Even then Jesus would probably have been hard put to draw the line as to what of himself was "just human" and what was "divine." This, after all, is the human experience. We are all made up of different facets. We can be aware—sometimes dimly, sometimes clearly—that who we are draws on how we've incorporated parental traits and influences, what our ethnic heritage is, what our inborn "personality" traits seem to be. It is another matter to delineate to what extent who we are is composed of them in their pure form and to what extent they have been shaped and actualized by our own uniqueness. The comparison to Jesus is not perfect; we are not multiple natures, but our experience can give us, perhaps, some inkling of Jesus'.

Acknowledging Jesus' full humanity provides a rich context out of which to reflect on two New Testament statements. Luke says that Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature" (2:52). He *grew*. He entered more fully into the reality of who he was, embraced his union with God, welcomed it, learned to be true to the self he was given.

The Book of Hebrews says, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered." Surely this must mean more than a grudging acceptance, "OK, whatever, have it your way" or even an unquestioning acceptance of some external command. Jesus *learned* what it meant to allow the divine nature within him to be fully realized. In so doing, he learned what that meant in concrete actions. But, as biblical scholar John Donahoe reminded us in our 2011 Lenten lectures, the biblical term "obedience" means more than doing what one is told. Its authentic translation is "deep listening." Jesus *learned* to listen to who he was, to Who he was—two natures inextricably linked in one person, a "hypostatic union" and to "obey" to be faithful to himself.

So there's no "little Lord" Jesus in that manger. Rather what we can see is only an absolutely human baby. However, an awareness of how "human" Jesus really was—and is—can deepen our sense of awe and our acknowledgment of the unfathomably, infinite love of God for us. For this newborn is also truly God--God not just come to us; but God come in this way.

There is another equally awe inspiring realization that awaits us at that stable. What are the ramifications of believing that the Second Person of the Trinity became human, really human for our understanding of what a human being is—of what each one of us is? Karl Rahner, perhaps the greatest Catholic theologian in centuries, explored that in some depth and we will draw largely on his insights

in the following reflections. (All non-Scriptural quoted phrases or sentences from here on are taken from his writings.)

If we can allow ourselves to see Jesus as a fully human, really human being, we can reject any notion of Jesus—in the manger or as an adult—as some kind of super human. He did not have a special kind of humanity—the deluxe version, one-of-kind, specially designed to be the Incarnate One. Rather, his humanity was “like us in all things, except sin.”

Jesus is unique, not because his basic humanity is extraordinary, exceptional compared to the rest of us. Rather he is unique because as Word made flesh he reveals the “real essence” of what it means to be human and he accepts it fully. Rahner’s definition of the human person, therefore, is not “*homo sapiens*”; what defines the human is its potential to incarnate the Second Person of the Trinity. You, me--any one of us could have been chosen to be the Incarnate Savior. There is nothing inherently lacking in our human nature that would disqualify it from being the one in whom the Word would become flesh. We are designed to have that capacity, to be the “grammar of God’s self-expression.”

The fact that Jesus of Nazareth was, historically, the one chosen does not mean that our potential to receive God’s life goes unused. Rather, Rahner maintains, God’s self-communication of God’s own life, God’s sharing of life with us is what we have traditionally called *grace*. It is different in fullness but not in kind from the divine self-communication offered to Jesus of Nazareth. “Grace in all of us and hypostatic union in the one Jesus Christ can only be understood together.”

Jesus is God’s irrevocable guarantee that God’s own self-communication is intended for—and is actually offered to—all human persons. Jesus reveals the heart of human grace destiny as well as the way in which that is to be fulfilled. What we call “grace” is in its fullest sense a share in God’s own life, offered to us in the depths of our individual personhood. It is that which defines us as human, rather than animal; it is what makes us human. It is offered to us as free creatures, so it can be ignored, refused. Human fulfillment, the “life in abundance” which Jesus promised, requires that we embrace that gift in love and trust, as Jesus did.

In this way, the Incarnation reveals the true meaning of creation as a whole. When we look at Jesus, the ultimate design of God as Creator is made fully evident. In both creation and Incarnation the process at work is precisely the same: God’s communication of God’s own self.

In this, Rahner follows the Eastern theological tradition and the minority opinion in Western theology that the Incarnation was not a divine change of plans to accommodate human sin. Rather the Incarnation was intended from the beginning as revelation.

Thus, creation, and in a particular way the human person, must always be understood in the light of the hypostatic union. For Rahner, the history of evolution is the history of the self-transcendence of creation. Under the impetus of God’s call, creation was a process always reaching out for more. Even matter possessed a basic thrust toward consciousness and openness to transcendence: a thrust which reaches its “definitive breakthrough” with the appearance of human beings. In Jesus, we see the significance and the goal of human transcendence and the transcendent thrust of creation in general.

Sometimes we are a little wary about becoming too caught up in God. Unfortunately some of the stories of some saints can contribute to this. Being a saint seems to involve leaving one's humanity behind. We need to remember the baby in the manger just being a baby. We need to remember the man Jesus—totally open to the God and to God's call, and yet called by critics a “drunkard and a glutton” (Lk. 7:34; Mt 11:19) because of his enjoyment of dinners with friends. (Not the Jesus—to hear some people talk—whom you would expect to say at Cana, “Don't you think everyone's had enough wine?”) In Jesus is revealed the central mystery of divine-human relationship: that the divine presence and power perfect rather than dissolve human reality. Humanity reaches full self-actualization precisely in—not despite—total acceptance of God.

Jesus was apparently comfortable in his own humanity, his own bodyliness. That should put an end to any disparagement of everyday ordinary down-to-earth humanness. Christianity, however, has had a hard time grappling with that. Quick to embrace the Greek preference for rationality and abstract idealization, Christianity has too often history tended to disdain the body. (Yes, our humanity can be weak and a source of temptation. So can wealth and power, but Christianity doesn't seem to have the same problem accepting them.) Much anti-woman sentiment has been tied to women's presumed greater earthiness, fleshiness than men; men are more rational, more suited to higher things. It turns out that's a false distinction. What makes our humanity precious is precisely its flesh-ness, its capacity to be the Incarnate One.

Yes, standing before the manger scene can be a powerful impetus for gratitude to God, for this wondrous gift of Jesus, for coming to us in this way. Perhaps, it can also be an occasion to give thanks for the wonder of our own humanity as well, for the graced gift of God's own self, given to us, for our potential to receive that gift.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

And I said to the one who stood at the gate of the year, “Give me light that I may tread safely into the Unknown.”

And s/he replied, “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

-Minnie Haskins

FIRE OF ADVENT

by Edward Hays from *A Pilgrim's Almanac*, p. 187

Advent, like its cousin Lent, is a season for prayer and reformation of our hearts. Since it comes at winter time, fire is a fitting sign to help us celebrate Advent...If Christ is to come more fully into our lives this Christmas, if God is to become really incarnate for us, then fire will have to be present in our prayer. Our worship and devotion will have to stoke the kind of fire in our souls that can truly change our hearts. Ours is a great responsibility not to waste this Advent time.