

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
December 22, 2019

Hope springs eternal!

The Andy Reid/Patrick Mahomes era brings **hope** to long-suffering Chief's fans who have not been to a Super Bowl for 50-years. While a new Kansas City Royals ownership group and new manager have renewed **hope** that we will not have to wait another 30-years for a World Series championship!

Hope has been a primary theme during this Advent season:

Throughout the four weeks of Advent, we heard Isaiah's vivid prophecy of hope for peace, renewal of the land and people, and finally a Messiah:

- All nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,"
- A "shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse" and "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,"
- Last week, on Gaudete Sunday, we heard that the "parched land will exult," and "the steppe will rejoice and bloom."
- Finally, today, the fourth Sunday of Advent, we heard Isaiah attempt to reassure, to give hope to, the king of Judah, Ahaz, that he need not fear the combined armies allied against him but that he should have faith in God's assurances of success. When Ahaz' skepticism continued, God, through Isaiah, gave Ahaz a sign of hope that the hereditary line of King David will continue into the future with Isaiah's words: "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son" who will be named "Emmanuel."

In first-century Palestine, the Jewish people were still searching for hope: Hope for freedom from the bonds of Roman rule, hope for a Messiah, who would return Israel to the grandeur that it had known in the days of King David.

That hope of the Jewish people, as conveyed by Isaiah, was to be fulfilled through the incarnation of God himself, Jesus Christ, whose Nativity we will celebrate in just a few days. However, Jesus was not that great warrior king anticipated by the Jewish people. Rather, Jesus preached a gospel of humility, love, forgiveness and peace. Jesus gave those of his time, and us, a different kind of hope: Hope through which we can confidently expect, with God's help--with God's grace--to achieve our eternal salvation.

People, particularly in today's world, cannot live without hope. Just listen to the news and you'll be inundated with suffering and hopelessness: Natural disasters, escalating tensions between and within nations, climate change and rampant disease, all add to a feeling of hopelessness. With such despair all around us, why do we continue to hope? Hope won't change the unpleasant realities around us, but...

Hope does change us. As Pope Francis has said "Hope in the Lord never disappoints us; it's a font of joy and peace in our hearts." He adds, "Hope sustains us so we don't drown in our difficulties." People with hope bring light into the darkness. But how do we bring that hope, that light, to the world around us? One way to give hope is through our individual acts, both large and small, of charity, thoughtfulness and kindness. In these last few days of Advent and continuing on throughout the Christmas season, I encourage each of you to intentionally seek opportunities to give hope to those around you, particularly our less fortunate neighbors, through acts of charity.

I will close with the words of Mother Teresa who said, when asked about the seemingly impossible task to help all the needy in the slums in which she worked:

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

I invite you to **also** cast a stone to create ripples of **hope**.