

**Second Sunday of Advent A - *On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse***  
December 8, 2019

**"Hope knows how to suffer to carry out a project and knows how to sacrifice. Are you capable of sacrificing yourself for the future or do you just want to live in the present?"** (Pope Francis). So, ***"This Christmas, when Christ comes, will he find a warm heart? Make the season of Advent by loving and serving others with God's own love and concern."*** (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Two weeks ago, our Diocesan Bishop Paul came to confirm the Grade 3 children. Confirmation is a grace that completes, strengthens and deepens the grace of Baptism, a source of courage and invites the one who is confirmed to a stronger witnessing of Christian life. The children are like what Isaiah says in the first reading (11:1-10): ***"On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD."*** The stump of Jesse refers to the lineage of King David, Jesse's son and ancestor of Jesus, with traits of a royal and exalted figure who is anointed by God for a special purpose. I have faith that their parents, the schools, and the parishes will provide them with the best nutrition to grow in faith and in Jesus because God has anointed all these children for a special purpose. But... little shoots growing out of a stump? Most people view this as an unwanted eyesore. There are all kinds of remedies on the Internet for how to seal off a stump to prevent it from giving out new shoots of life, and to kill those that manage to shoot out. Surely, these children will face challenges and storms of hatred, injustice, ridicule from their peers for being Christians in this non-believing generation. But ...

Many years ago, I read an article in a book on science fair project ideas. In the past few decades, scientists have constructed a dome (Biosphere 2), a miniature version of our planet to study how the planet's living systems actually work. They discovered from it the importance of wind in a plant's life. In the dome, they had trees growing faster than they would grow in the wild, but they also found that these trees would collapse before they mature. This was caused by the lack of wind in the dome. Yes, wind. It turns out wind makes a tree stronger, thus able to mature and not fall due to its own weight. Movement causes stress in the structure of the tree. So, to compensate, it manages to grow something called stress wood that helps position the tree where it would get optimum resources, enabling it to grow in a more solid manner even in the storms. (That'd strength of materials for engineers!) So, like the tree, our children will face winds and even storms, but our creator will give them the strength and wisdom to encounter the unknown danger and future, to wait patiently, hopefully for the peaceful kingdom, the coming of baby Jesus and the end of the world.

On Monday, our busy bishop will ordain three seminarians to Transitional Deacons on their way to priesthood. Compared with the children, they are mature adults. But I am sure they have faced many obstacles, even suffering, on their way to serve the Lord. And this is not the end yet. Like the children, they too will face challenges. They too will face storms of hatred, injustice and even persecution. But ...

There was an article in Facebook a few months ago about a young man who had recently entered a religious order and starting out on the long and difficult road to priesthood. Before entering the seminary, he composed a short essay about the factors that influenced his decision. He wrote: ***"...There was something very, very deep down whispering very, very quietly that I might just have a vocation. My initial response was a 'Naaah.' But as time went on, especially when so much violence and terrorism happening throughout the world, I started thinking a lot more about what life was really about, what it was really worth... That period was God's painful but effective way of pointing me to a path that would really fill the emptiness I felt."*** This young man saw the problems of the world, and felt a desire to do something about them. The grace of God showed him what it is showing us this Sunday: **to make the world a better place, to help it fulfill the plan God has for it, by bringing others closer to Christ.**

And only true Christians - not superficial, Pharisaic Christians - can bring others closer to Christ who can make the lion lie down with the lamb.

That's what Advent is all about. It is about God choosing to come to Earth as a vulnerable, defenseless human baby to bring "**peace on earth and good will to man.**" It is also part of reorienting our mindset during Advent. That is what lies behind the courage to let Jesus be born in our hearts, to give new birth to the stump: **God's kingdom has arrived.** Isaiah paints a picture of what that kingdom is like in the first reading: *"Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them."* Peace and wholeness. It's for us Christians to make it happen. To love others, to help others to grow in faith and in Christ, to help the little shoot to reach out and grow stronger and stronger even in the storms.