



Fourth Sunday of Advent (Love)

Matthew 1:18–25

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel” (which means “God with us”).

December 18, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Scriptures: Isaiah 7: 10-14 • Romans 1: 1-7 • Matthew 1: 18-24

Did you know, that the season of Christmas actually lasts until Epiphany. Epiphany, or the 12th day of Christmas, falls on January 6 and marks the official end to the festive season for many Christians. The Twelfth Night after Christmas also marks a visit to the baby Jesus by The Magi, (the three Kings, or Wise Men). The word 'Epiphany' comes from Greek and means 'manifestation'. It celebrates 'the revelation of God in his Son as human in Jesus Christ'. So, if you are interested in celebrating Christmas and think you just don't have enough time, you do have more than adequate time.

The one scriptural phrase, that identifies the final Sunday of Advent is this: '*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel which means 'God is with us.'*

I am convinced that this phrase speaks of the deepest feelings humanity can experience: the longing for the sacred, something or someone who will give meaning to life, give us a reason for being on this planet, give us reason to rise from sleep each day and set ourselves to the work of making Christ present in our world,

All generations in history, seemingly, have had this craving, this sense that there must be meaning in life that is yet unfulfilled, a sense that we are not simply creatures living from day to day without purpose or principle. It must seem to many that there is even certain sacredness about the cosmos itself, the place where we make our home and long for our future. In short, the longing for the sacred that gives meaning to life is ingrained and imbedded in the very nature of our humanness.

Unless, there is some reason, some cause, some rationale for being human why should we struggle each day to sustain life? Is making a living the ultimate goal we live for? Is there not something more ultimate, more fundamental than that?

That seems to be the question that drives not only the philosopher, but the ordinary person as well, namely, to find a goal in life, to do good and avoid evil, to love one's neighbor, to seek justice and make peace. All of these, it seems to me, have this as their foundation in the sense of the sacred that is all around us.

Christian's have a long history of searching for God. Our roots in this quest reach back into the Hebrew Scriptures where, for instance, we hear the great Isaiah, a Jewish prophet, make the prediction of Emmanuel (God with us) we quoted earlier. Perhaps he was imagining someone who would finally bring peace and security to the Jewish

people. Little did he realize, of course, that this Emmanuel would be the Savior, not only of his own people, but of all humankind; he would be the one who would speak for justice for the poor, peace for those who had known only conflict their entire lives. Little did Isaiah realize that this Emmanuel would be called "God-Son," Son of the Most High God. Little did he realize that this Emmanuel would finally and ultimately help humankind understand how precious they are in God's mind, how important it is to look for sacred meaning in life each day.

If you were to ask me, therefore, what I would consider the most important phrase in all of sacred scripture, I could only say "God is with us." God has been with us for all eternity, even though we were not completely aware of it, not until Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary the Virgin, came among us to remind us that it is really all right to be human. From that point forward it is up to us to discover God in all things human and earthly. It is all this that makes getting up every morning a sacred experience.

Now, having reflected on all that, let us hope that there will still be time enough to decorate the church, our homes, our businesses and sing a few Christmas hymns. My prayer is that because "God is with us", that you keep Him in your heart and mind each day. May He bless you and yours this happiest of seasons of the year.

Happy Birthday – Laura (12/27)



Love

*Each year, God asks us to shed one more coat of awareness,
one more dream state and come alive to the vision of God's plan for each of us and the world-at-large.*

*The older we get, the harder this is to do.
As children we had a sense of wonder.
Our eyes were wide open and drinking in the fascinating gifts we beheld... Our thirsty souls could not have
enough of the wonders of creation.*

*Then, somehow, we grew too old to dream.
We tired of the abundance of the world,
or at least grew weary of keeping up with the feast of life,
and stepped away from the banquet of life.*

*The natural gift of wonder God gave us as children
was meant to be kept alive.
Instead we let wonder go to sleep.
We entered the typical dream state of most humans.*

*Why else does Jesus tell us today, 'Stay awake!'...
Advent says, 'Wake up and realize the
gifts of love you have received.'*

Psychology says, 'Let go.' Spirituality says, 'Wake up.'
In both cases there is a withdrawal from the busyness of daily life (our dream state) and a waking up to the subconscious and spiritual depths of ourselves.