



December 13, 2020

Dear friends of God,

As we approach Christmas, I need to address the number of people who are able to attend Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Because of Covid restrictions, fewer than 200 people may be in attendance at each of the Masses. Many of us might prefer to attend the earlier Mass on Christmas Eve, but this year that simply may not be possible. If we spread attendance out between the four Masses (three on Christmas Eve and one on Christmas morning), I do not believe that this will be an issue. However, I need to ask everyone to be patient.

This weekend we celebrate the third Sunday of Advent. This Sunday is traditionally known as "*Gaudete Sunday*." The Latin word *gaudete* means, "to rejoice." It is taken from a prayer in the Roman Missal that may be chanted in place of a gathering song. This day is a time of rejoicing as we anticipate the arrival of Christ. We live in a time where we might struggle with rejoicing. Maybe can relate more to darkness than to light, but God encourages us to remember that the "...spirit of the Lord God is..." with us, we are God's anointed. God has clothed us with healing and has created our world to be his sacred garden. For that, we rejoice.

Amidst the challenges of our present world, there is still much beauty. We cannot allow ourselves to fall into the trap of cynicism. There are many who will use our cynical attitudes to divide our nation and our world. We need to be cynical of cynicism. The polarization in our human family is killing us. It is through unity that healing comes to us. God calls us to be one with each other. By being with one our brothers and sisters in our human family, Christ will draw us into unity with our God who is One as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our destiny is to be one with the One who is one. God was born to us in the child Jesus to share this destiny of unity with the entire human family.

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his book, *The Idiot*, writes these prophetic words: "Beauty will save the world." These simple words continue to feed my soul and encourage me. We can move busily in our daily lives and forget to pay attention to the beauty that is all around us. The Trappist, Father Thomas Merton was an avid journal writer. In this journal entry, he was noting moments of beauty in his day at the Abbey of Gethsemani where he lived from December 10, 1941 until his accidental death on December 10, 1968. On December 4, 1950, Thomas Merton wrote:

"Moments of beauty in this day...Sunlight and clear sky and wet grass behind the old wagon shed. Three young bulls in a pen where the chickens were, near that spring at the south end of the vegetable garden."

There is something important about paying attention to the beauty all around us. Beauty shows itself in the simplest ways through things like chickens, bulls and a vegetable garden. It strikes me that a good exercise would be to notice the beauty that is all around us as we prepare for the coming of the beautiful child, Jesus. God creates all that is beautiful in our midst. Moreover, that beauty will save the world. We are missing something important if we do not slow down and take the time to be in the present moment and see the beauty all around. God has given us a lovely world to astonish us.

The poet Mary Oliver put it this way:

Instructions for living a life.  
Pay attention.  
Be astonished.  
Tell others about it.

St. Paul tells us this weekend to pray without ceasing. At its root, prayer is simply paying attention. I want to encourage all of us to be mindful of our world and to allow ourselves to be astonished by it. When we share this awe, we rejoice as we reveal the Gospel of our God who created all that is beautiful.

Advent peace! Much love,

*F. Ken*