

**Homily**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent - A**

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December 8, 2022

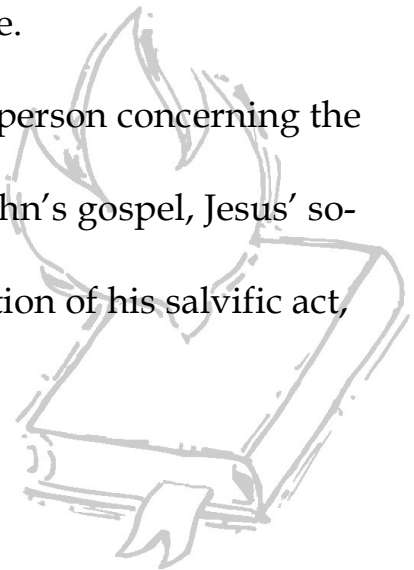
Is 2: 1-5  
Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9  
Rom 13: 11-14  
Mt 24: 37-44

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As soon as I read the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, the first thing that came to my mind during the season of Advent was Jesus' passion in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the Mount of Olives. What a crazy thing to think during the season of Advent – Jesus' passion on the night before he died!!!

Because I went to visit the Holy Land a couple times in my life, because I visited that garden and heard the story of what had happened to all those beautiful hardwoods, the story of the Olive Wood trees at Gethsemane gave me hope in my faith and reminded me about that image of the root coming from the stump of Jesse.

To be honest, I am more of a synoptic gospel person concerning the Passion Narratives than the gospel of John. In John's gospel, Jesus' so-called agony in the garden was more of a revelation of his salvific act,



which is why that part of the gospel is referenced by scholars as “The Book of Glory.”

For me, I more associate myself with the traditional passion narratives from the other three gospels and the suffering that Jesus feared he would have to endure. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, our Lord prays to his Father to spare him from this suffering but was willing to endure this passion of death if this was his Father’s will. I wonder in today’s age if any of us, including me, have the strength to follow through with that promise.

Because a good deal of my suffering was the result in me trying to protect children (knowing that the backlash that has taken place), my suffering has affected me quite severely. Nevertheless, in my heart I believe that God is calling me to live out this path of my vocation. In my particular suffering, I just keep going back to Matthew 18: 6 and Luke 17: 11 and the image that it would be better to wrap a stone around your neck and three be thrown in the bottom of the sea than to cause a little one to sin. My anguish defending these words have not been easy –

when priests call me “dead to the diocese” because of my actions, I realize that Matthew 5: 12 no longer are nice words to hear but a mantra that I am living within my own faith life.

When I associate my suffering in a very small way to our Lord’s infinitely greater suffering at Gethsemane, I can only imagine what Jesus had to endure when he was taken from that garden with all those beautiful olive of trees that surrounded him prior to his crucifixion.

It is not like this suffering just happened in the first century or just happens now. This suffering happens in every age for any person who lives like God in the world. The mobs and the riots that incited this arrest and this crucifixion of God repeated itself when the Jewish faithful suffered a bitter defeat to the Roman army no more than forty years or so after Jesus’ death, in 70 AD when their sacred temple was destroyed for a second time (the first-time taking place in 586 BC).

After this bitter defeat in 70 AD, the Roman army subsequently destroyed most everything that the Jewish people held sacred - their land, their people, their Torah and supposedly their God, *our* God, was

destroyed by these Roman forces. The forces went as far as to even destroy all those olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane, hoping not to leave a trace of any kind of faith life with the people that lived there.

As I have been told, as the story continues, those olive trees that had been leveled were left for dead, and yet, even though they looked dead, the sprout eventually emerged out of the stump and started to grow again. Eight centuries later, that so-called group of dead trees took to life, and now today is filled with wonderful flourishing, large olive trees that are even bigger than before.

For me, this image of the revitalized trees gave me hope because no matter how many times people try to kill the faith, what today we might call the world of the dominant culture, if a remnant remains, the Church will continue to grow. In my life, I have learned that the dominant cultures in our world try to eradicate anything that does not agree with the tenets of its belief system. Throughout the centuries, one dominant culture after another has tried to eradicate everything contrary to what it believes, sometimes with success and sometimes not. In this age, we

have experienced that same type of bullying with a culture that often is contrary with the tenets of Roman Catholicism. For them, they believe that they are right and you are wrong; as a result, they often try to oppress anyone that does not believe them.

One of my favorite resources named Morrie Schwartz would tell us, “Do not let society dictate your culture; you define your own. In the world of faith, we allow God help to define our culture and what we believe. I know that most every Pope that became a Pope prior to the Edict of Milan in 313 AD was willing to be martyred to uphold this basic teaching, including Pope Clement I (whose feast day we just celebrated). Scholars called Pope Clement the first “Apostolic Father,” the pope who succeeded St. Peter as the chosen head of the Church. Pope St. Clement had a wonderful mission of caring for souls and loving people; the manner in which he died paralleled that of the olive tree – his enemies threw an anchor around his neck and tossed him into the sea.

For me, that water in which Clement drowned became a symbol of both death and life (which normally serves as my Easter homily). That

Clement died from water drowning him is true - water can destroy life but also can resuscitate it and sustain it. In the case of Pope St. Clement, he died in water but he also gave the Church life because he held to the ideals of the Catholic faith and showed us an example of someone who was even willing to withstand death just like our Lord did, so that the church could persevere and continue.

This last week, we also celebrated the feast of yet another martyr named St. Cecilia, this beautiful woman whose death was so grotesque and so difficult to even fathom. Yet, we remember her as a beautiful woman with a beautiful voice who loved to sing, who loved her purity and who loved her family, a woman who was willing to die to uphold the faith.

From the examples of martyrs and so many others, I experience a great deal of death to life experiences that the olive trees from Gethsemane symbolize. From the stump of a tree do we encounter the remnant of Jesse, the father of King David that leads us to the new King

David of the New Testament, the one who is placed in the line and lineage of Jesse and David, Jesus Christ our Lord.

If we follow that example of these saints and of what these olive trees in Gethsemane represent, if we allow the tree of faith to nourish us even when others try to cut it down, then we understand the beauty of Christianity. We know that no matter how venomous others are in cutting down the tree, of cutting down our faith, we also know that that tree can regrow if we understand the importance of life coming from death.

The question is whether the leaders of the church today are willing to die for the cause of the faith? Are they, are *we*, willing to sacrifice to uphold the teachings of the Church? Sometimes we turn against the basic principles and teachings of the Church that are set upon us in the Catechism and in the Bible. Because we do not like these teachings at times, many in the world wish to rewrite them so they conform to the beliefs of the dominant culture. Suddenly, the dominant culture or

public opinion try to overwhelm the teachings of God instead of allowing the teachings of God to lead us and guide us.

Do we do honor to those who have died to uphold these principles? I was mocked by a bishop who said to me, "What do you want to be a martyr?" In the world of faith, there is nothing better than being a martyr of the faith if it is done right, if it is done out of love, if it is done because you care about the people around you and you are willing to give your life so other lives can be saved. We must respect the teachings of the church to realize that no matter how much others cut us down for what God teaches us, the tree will continue to grow metaphorically. That is why we are here today.

Jesus Christ gave us hope by coming down and becoming incarnate. Jesus Christ gave us hope by suffering and dying for us, which was his purpose for coming down to earth and assuming a human and divine nature. If we follow our Lord's example, if we follow his sacrifice, and yes, at times if we follow his martyrdom, we will understand what it means to get to heaven. Whether that Martyrdom is metaphorical or



literal, please know that I will do what I can to sacrifice and suffer. For your sake, please do the same for your family, your friends, the church, the community, and for the people that we meet. This is our prayer.