

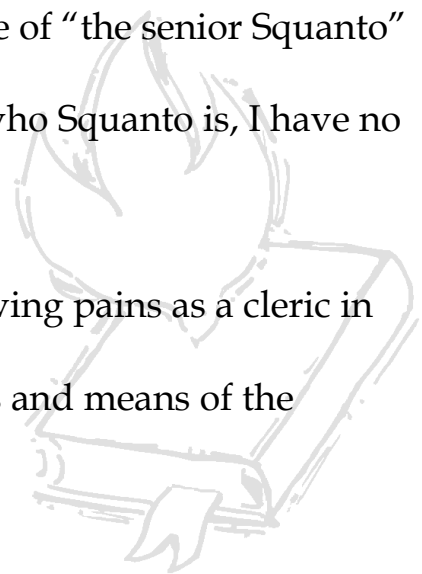
Homily
4th Sunday of Advent – C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 18-19, 2021

Mi 5: 1-4
Ps 80: 2-3, 15-16, 18-19
Heb 10: 5-10
Lk 1: 39-45

As I minister through the twenty-fifth year of my life as a priest, I was reflecting this week on how the growth of my priesthood has somewhat paralleled the growth of my brother Julian, who turned 16 this week and to whom I devoted my attention this month in activities that were dedicated to him. As I have chosen not to raise any children of my own in light of the vocation I have chosen to live, I vicariously experience the life of the parent by watching my younger brother advance in years, from the moment of his birth to taking his first steps, from celebrating his First Communion Liturgy to watching his school play last month as he played the impressive role of “the senior Squanto” during his school’s Thanksgiving celebration (who Squanto is, I have no idea...).

Like Julian, I have experienced my own growing pains as a cleric in the Church, learning by trial and error the ways and means of the



Catholic priest. I have stumbled on many occasions; in some instances, I have learned lessons that were akin to “growing pains” of a child. In the process, he and I have learned in our own separate ways the importance of integrity in the lives we have chosen to live and the role that God plays in those paths we have chosen to walk.

I guess that my greatest joy in watching my brother advance in age is the growth of his maturity level and the joy of life that I experience when I watch him develop into a good Christian soul. For me, I find great satisfaction knowing that I have done whatever small part I could to allow my brother to grow, in order that he can make some type of contribution to the world in which we live.

It is this theme of birth and the development of life that serves as the theme to our readings today, a theme that prepares us for the most important birth our faith lives commemorate in the next few days. What I find interesting about the Old Testament is that two contemporaries of the 9th Century B.C., namely the Prophets Isaiah and Micah, both address this specific issue, albeit from very different points of view. In a way, I feel a small connection to the prophet Micah, who preaches about

signs to the good folks of Judah from a “country boy’s perspective” and a lifestyle to which I am very much accustomed. This is to be compared to his contemporary Isaiah, who lived in the metropolitan city of Jerusalem and addressed similar issues with the nearby king with whom he had contact.

As a person who is supposed to read the bible and understand the meaning of this “word of God” for your sakes and for mine, I understand that both Micah and Isaiah lived more or less around the same time period and who both warned their respective followers from the country and the city, that they would lose the land that the Lord provided them if they remained unfaithful to the Lord. In some small way, I believe in my heart that both Micah and Isaiah knew that the chosen people did not have the strength to follow the way of the Lord by their own accord, that they would fall subsequently and would need the assistance of God to redeem them because of the life of sin that they had chosen.

And so, in a way to prepare these descendants of Abraham for the sufferings that were yet to come, both prophets use the imagery of

childbirth to illustrate these sufferings that they would soon encounter. The fifth chapter of Micah describes this subject of a woman's labor rather extensively (which is the subject of today's first reading); Isaiah parallels this theme on numerous occasions in his own writings as well (chapters 12, 21, & 26 to name a few).

Concerning my vocation, I have a stock response to anyone who tells me how hard a life I must live as a priest, namely that my life is a piece of cake compared to that of a parent who has to raise a couple of kids in their life. From what the women of our community tell me about this subject, the most painful moment in the mother's life is that initial moment when she has to give birth; none of the euphemisms I could use to describe this moment would be fitting to say in a church. In the world of faith, I have experienced similar pains in the world of spirituality, pains that become necessary for my own faith life if I wish to see the joys of heaven on the last day.

In this metaphor of the woman in labor, any mother will tell you how the pains of childbirth pale in comparison to the beauty and presence of God in that child as a gift that no present under a tree could equal in any

sense. At least the Christian mothers who speak to me gladly and willingly would endure the suffering of childbirth to experience the joy of life that comes forth into the world. As a faithful group of people who defend life from the moment of conception, all of us recognize the beauty that this life brings to the world and so we suffer in this world to defend that life, knowing the strong opposition that confronts the person who defends this life.

For Isaiah and Micah, they recognize that there is the other side to this life of suffering that their followers were about to encounter. They both realize that suffering will take place, due to the Chosen People's disobedience to God. They realize that the Chosen People will eventually change their ways, due to the efforts of a "new" King David who will enter the world, who will be born in the line of the first King David. They will meet a new king who will descend from the city of Bethlehem, the same land from which David was born. It is this joy that Mary anticipates in the gospel reading from today, a joy that we commemorate on this day of Christ's coming into the world, this Christ-

mas, where the Lord assumes a human nature for our sakes and serves as our Lord and King of all creation.

The beauty of this season of Advent is that we realize that the pains of sin that we have experienced in life are reconciled by the one whose birth is anticipated in our gospel reading from St. Luke. The joy of Advent is to realize how significant are the growing pains that our Lord endured in his human life for our sakes, from the moment of birth to his physical development into a man, ultimately to his suffering and death on the cross, become necessary pains for our development and salvation as a human race.

And like a parent who grows in their own development through experiencing life in the raising of a child, we, too, develop in our spiritual life as we walk the life of Christ on earth, from the moment of his conception to his birth, to what we commemorate in the weeks and months ahead. The pains of Christ's life become necessary for us to find a way to restore our relationship with God; the pains of Christ's life become a necessary model for us to live in order that we find eternal peace in the lives we choose to live.

And so this weekend, as we commemorate the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we remind ourselves of the pains that we too must endure in order to cross over the path of sin in order to find the path of redemption. We suffer for the lives of our kids; we suffer for the defense of our faith. We suffer so that the Church may continue to prosper; we suffer so that our parish may continue its mission in generations to come.

May we find blessings in the children who reflect the presence of Christ in this world. May we share this life of innocence and love with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.