



Advent is the season of hope: for centuries, human beings waited for God to show Himself in a way that we could truly touch Him, hear Him, learn from Him the path to eternal life. The expectations and desires of humanity were met beyond any possible dream we could have had in Jesus Christ, fully human and like us in all things but sin, and at the same time, the Son of God who enters the mystery of God the Father and a continual outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Although I am person of fundamental hope, there are moments of discouragement for me as I know there are for you. I can get a bit down about my limited vision of the future of the church that Jesus has given us. Religious vocations to the priesthood and religious life have diminished dramatically in the past forty years. I am sixty-seven years old and I am still below the median age of the Redemptorists of the province that serves here at St. Martin's. Attendance at Mass in the United States is also experiencing a serious decline. I have heard many of you voice your sadness at the fact that your children and grandchildren, to whom you sought so diligently to pass on the Catholic faith, no longer go to Mass or even have their children baptized. I know this can break your heart. We can see with our own eyes that many of young are not in our pews. I think I could say the same about many of our adults who find attending Mass to not be a major priority of their lives. Here at St. Martin's, a parish that I love, and one that has wonderful parishioners, it can be difficult to get enough volunteers to help distribute Holy Communion at our Sunday Masses. We are committed to trying any program that will help people to come to know and love the God revealed in Jesus who so loved them.

I do not place blame or guilt on those who do not seem to practice their Catholic faith. There are many reasons for this reality. Much of the cause lies with our culture that has grown so very secular. I often use the image of a tsunami of secularism that has hit our world. God, either directly or indirectly, is pushed out of our society and He is considered by many to be irrelevant. I also know that some of the cause rest with our Church. We fail to make the Good News of Jesus Christ truly good news to our world. Maybe some stay away because we are not feeding their hungers. It seems that life is more hectic and demanding today that it was in the recent past. When you greet someone with the words, *how are you.*, a frequent response is, *I am so busy. I have no time between work, taking care of the kids and the house, all the other things that must be done.* Still, I believe people do what they want to do; if people want to be an active Catholic, they can no matter how busy they are. I know that being a person, or even a disciple of Jesus, is not marked by Mass attendance alone. There are many incredibly

generous and loving people, who are concerned about others in need and the problems of society, who are doing God's work and following Him in their own way. Attending Mass, receiving the Eucharist, hearing the Word of God does not make you a good person, but it is a great source of God's grace to live out our call to be a disciple of the Lord. I often quote Debra Barone, Raymond's wife, in *Everybody loves Raymond*, who, when asked by Ray why she goes to Mass, responds, *I go to be part of something bigger than just you and me and the kids, I go to thank God for the week I had with you and the children, and I go to pray for the grace to get through another week with you and the kids!* I think that is one of the best definitions of the power of the Mass I have ever heard. I go to Mass to find to find the grace to follow Jesus. I need the Eucharist.

Most of the time, daily, I am happy and joyful. It is only when I start thinking about the future of the Church and where it is going that I get a bit concerned. The other night, we had a talent show for the young people of the parish that was organized by our parish young minister Diana Hughes. I encouraged her when she asked to do this, but I worried that she (and I) might be disappointed by the results. It is a temptation to get caught up in numbers. How many people went to Mass? What was the collection? How children were confirmed? How many ushers are there at the Masses. Practical and real questions, but not the most important ones. I have done many missions with Father John McGowan over the years. Some were to packed churches and others could have been held in a phone booth. We always say, *Jesus said to see them, not count them.*

Well, the talent show was a tremendous success (somewhat to my surprise) with many young people participating. They showed great dedication; what they did in the show was a variety of singing, dancing, and funny skits. A significant number of parishioners attended and enjoyed both the talents and the energy of the show. Numerous people and groups donated baskets for the auction. People were generous in supporting the fifty-fifty and the auction. As a parish we can so very proud of Diana and her great team, the young who showed their talents, worked in the background, and all those who attended.

What seem to inspire the young people so very much, as well as all those who participated in the evening, was that the money raised was to provide a specially designed bicycle for a special needs child. This is called an Adaptive Tricycle meets the needs of a special needs child. So, our young people were on fire with the desire to provide this gift. The tricycle will be delivered in festive way to the surprised child. Whenever the goal of the event was mentioned, everyone clapped with enthusiasm. The Talent Night raised over \$2000.00 which is more than was expected and will certainly meet the goal of providing the bike. The young people of St. Martin of Tour Parish were so very determined to do this good deed. I think of the words of Jesus, *what you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do me.* They were putting the Gospel into action and serving the Lord. I could not be prouder of them. So, to all who made the night of love so possible, I say thank you. I also thank you for giving your pastor a B-12 shot of hope and joy to kick off the Advent season.