“And Mercy Became Flesh and Dwelt Among”

Advent Reflections 2016

1st Sunday of Advent

By Rev. Luis A. Vera, O.S.A.

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Articles written by Fr. Luis A. Vera, O.S.A.

Dear Friends,

As the Year of Mercy has come to an end, the mercy of God continues and our own works of mercy must be carried out in our day-to-day living. We had the opportunity to reflect upon the mercy of God for us, and how that mercy must be shared through our own lives. I am framing these reflections within the context of John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Word of God, the “Logos” has become flesh, human, one with us, one of us. The eternal One entered time and now shares in the messiness of our humanity. The invisible has become visible!

This eternal Word, in becoming flesh, also becomes the Mercy of God for all of Creation, including the human race. As we become more and more aware of that living Word among us, as we journey together during these days of Advent, and as we reflect upon the mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of Mercy becoming flesh and pitching his tent among us, we try to create a common good. We are all together in this living web we call Universe. We create together a common good as we struggle to bring peace in our communities and in our world and we create respect for human rights. That Mercy of God dwells among us as we learn how to create concerned citizens and how to create a world of mercy and forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Word becomes Mercy as we prepare to celebrate once again Emmanuel: God-is-with-us. Mercy in the here and now; in the struggle for justice and equality; as we go to the margins to learn from those we have rejected how to be forgiven. In the experience of most people, giving and receiving mercy is a humbling act of profound love. It is an action of God in the lives of the people as God intended it to be. Pope Francis writes,

“As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God’s action towards us…The mercy of God is his loving concern for each of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other” (The Face of Mercy, 9).

It is within this frame that we enter into this Holy Season of Advent. It is with Mercy: God-with-us, that we begin this pilgrimage as we wait and prepare for the Mercy of God to be born again. The story is ever ancient and ever new. The God-made-flesh, who pitches his tent among us, died for us and rose for us to bring us salvation, and we prepare for his coming. Together we proclaim the ancient prayer: Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

In solidarity,
Fr. Luis Vera, O.S.A.
“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.”

— Isaiah 2:4
created to suit our needs and our desires. When we create a world of fantasy we create a self-centered place where we are the focus instead of Christ and the community. When we look at imagination, especially Christian imagination, we go beyond… We create a world for the other; we search for that which is a common good. This type of imagination becomes prophetic imagination, an imagination that moves us to be the voice of so many whose voices have been silenced. On the other hand, it cannot be only prophetic; it has to be imaginative so it becomes full of creativity and commitment…and soul!

St. Paul tells the Romans and us “It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep… Let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light…” There is urgency in Paul’s invitation. Our world needs peace NOW! The darkness of our society needs to be dispelled NOW! “Therefore, stay awake!” as Jesus commands us. “For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.” But the mystery of this Season of Advent is that we prepare for the coming of a Christ who already came, a Christ who is present among us and a Christ who is to come! To be able to celebrate this great mystery with our whole being we must be able to imagine and we must listen to our baptismal call to be prophets. When we do so, we will be able to see the beauty that God created and is still creating with us.

As people of faith, in imagining a world of peace, we work for peace! As we imagine our communities as peaceful communities, we help one another to speak up for justice and for an end to all kinds of discrimination. We cannot do this alone, but as a prophetic community who calls one another into action in creative ways. Last September in Assisi, Pope Francis reminded us “Let us not tire of repeating that the name of God shall never justify violence. Only peace is holiness, not war.” Like Pope St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Pope Francis has called us to renew the diverse faiths to collaborate for a true, non-illusory peace. Our future consists in living together. For this reason, we are called to free ourselves from the heavy burdens of distrust, fundamentalism, and hatred. Isaiah’s call is Pope Francis’ call: a call to imagine a different world that will move us not to respond with indifference, but with loving action in a spirit of mercy and compassion.

We begin this Advent journey walking with a God who became mercy and dwells among us. Maranatha!
We read in St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans: “You know the time: it is the hour now for you to wake from sleep.”

1. Reflect on the “time” you live. Are you still asleep in your life as a faith person?
2. What do you need to wake from in your life?
3. How is God, the Creator, calling you to create at this time in your life?

1. In this Advent season, educate yourself about gun buyback programs in your area. Is there any way you may be able to help?
2. Start growing a vegetable or even a flower garden in your home as a sign of peace, beauty, and new life.
3. Think of a person you need to be at peace with and try, as much as you are able, to look at that relationship and see how you could bring about peace.

God of mercy and compassion,
God of peace and new beginnings,
Help us to be instruments of a peace that is lasting.

Calm our minds and our hearts, bring harmony into our lives.
May your loving mercy bring healing to a broken world
And may your Holy People be always instruments of your Peace. Amen.