

1 Advent C

December 2, 2018

St. Patrick

We shall hear this coming year, Sunday after Sunday, from St. Luke's Gospel. We hear it for the first time this start of our Advent—these words, speaking about Jesus at the end of time: **“Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming on a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now, when these things begin to take place, stand erect and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”**

Last month a St. Patrick parishioner sent me a reflection written by a woman named Beth Haile, who, with her husband and family, lives in Iowa. She has a Ph.D. in theology from Boston College, a Catholic university. Last year, her Advent began with the birth of her youngest son.

Then, five days before Christmas last year, she was diagnosed with a terminal cancer. As she put it tightly, **“I have one hand, two brain tumors, and four kids”** (1).

St. Patrick's: St. Luke's Gospel specifically teaches us that, when the Risen Jesus comes in his glory at the end of time—and at *any* time—**“Stand erect and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”** We are not to cower in fear.

Last Advent, Beth Haile, holding her newborn infant, no doubt sang during those four weeks, **“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”**—our Emmanuel, Jesus himself.

How has this God come to her in the midst of a terminal illness? She puts it clearly, **“In my friends, I see God.”** Then Beth Haile spells this out: **“I don't know what I would do without my friends who pray with me, weep with me, ache with me. Friends make sure my youngest son Nicholas has breast milk, even if it means driving out of state to a total stranger. Nicholas has this etched into his very body. My friends have fed him with *their* bodies. My friends have taken my kids when I have doctors' appointments...My friends have cleaned my house, cooked me meals...It is no accident that eternal life is described by the greatest theologian of all time [St. Thomas Aquinas] a friendship with God. In my friends, I see God. My friends bring God to me with their overwhelming acts of love.”**

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel!” I wonder if, last Advent, Beth Haile imagined her Emmanuel would come like *that* this year. Friends: How will Jesus, our Emmanuel, come to us *this* Advent?

Beth Haile teaches how *she* has met Jesus this year. **“I am encountering Jesus in a different way. I am encountering the Jesus who died when he was only 33 (my age when I was diagnosed)...The Jesus I am coming to know is not so much a healer...or a miracle worker, but a *sufferer*. How could he not have a preferential concern for the poor and suffering? He came to suffer, not to show us a way out of it, but to offer us solidarity.”**

Yes, St. Patrick’s, in these coming, festive days, we’re going to marvel at his Bethlehem advent—presented so lovingly in our apse. Yet, right below it—we can’t miss it, and we Catholics keep it ever before us—it’s the crucified Jesus...yes, the sufferer.

How does Beth Haile conclude her reflections? She explicitly ends it in this way: **“...I love my faith, I love being Catholic. It is a horrible time for the church (why now? I am heartbroken), but I know the church is much bigger than the hierarchy...I am proud to be a member of Jesus’ church. I take great consolation in the fact that his body appears on countless altars around the world, everyday. And I have been privileged to have seen, to have been served by his body, by the finest people of God...And I am happy that I get to keep being a part of this church when I die. People are praying for a miracle, but I know the miracle has already happened and pretty soon my eternity is going to be Easter morning.”**

Yes, when her “Easter morning” happens, St. Luke’s Gospel has Jesus telling her—and us—our posture when he comes, **“Stand erect and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”** We are not to tremble in fear.

St. Patrick’s: With gusto, throughout Advent, let’s sing **“O Come, O Come Emmanuel!”** It’s no telling how Jesus will come to us. However that will be: Stand straight, with our heads raised. As Beth Haile put it, **“I have come to know and to love a great God.”** That’s *our* Emmanuel, too. Let’s be loved by that great God!

(1) Beth Haile, "Reflections on a Terminal Diagnosis," (November 13, 2018) <https://catholicmoraltheology.com/reflections-on-a-terminal-diagnosis/>. All the quotations are from these reflections.

General Intercessions

December 2, 2018

1st Sunday of Advent

Deacon/Lector: Before reading the petitions, say--- “After each petition, please give this response, ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’ ”

Deepen with us, the church, your mercy and healing as you come this Advent; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bring us a new bishop who might have, in the words of Pope Francis, “the smell of the sheep”; we pray to you, O Lord—

Empower those who fear death so that they may embrace life; we pray to you, O Lord—

Lead public authorities, and all of us, to support those suffering from the Alaskan earthquakes, California wildfires, and all disasters; we pray to you, O Lord--

With this Advent wreath, remind us to prepare for the coming of Christ in our lives; we pray to you, O Lord—

With this Advent wreath, allow the light of Christ to penetrate the darkness of sin in our lives and in our broken world; we pray to you, O Lord—

(for the 8:30 a.m. Mass only--)

Give eternal rest to all who have died, especially Byron Cowan; we pray to you, O Lord--

