

Sick, And You Visited Me

HOMILIES AND REFLECTIONS FOR CYCLE B

EDITED BY DEACON JIM KNIPPER

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The opinions in each homily/reflection do not necessarily represent
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“Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet.”

Pope Francis

“Anyone who truly knows creatures may be excused from listening to sermons for every creature is full of God, and is a book.”

-

Meister Eckhart

“No language about God will ever be fully adequate to the burning mystery which it signifies.”

-

Elizabeth Johnston

“The test of a preacher is that his congregation goes away saying, not ‘What a lovely sermon.’ but, ‘I will do something!’”

Francis de Sales

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
PREFACE	3

ADVENT SEASON

1 ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	7
DEACON GREG KANDRA	
2 ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT	11
DAVID A. DAVIS	
3 RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	17
JAMES MARTIN, S.J.	
4 TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT	23
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH	

CHRISTMAS SEASON

CHRISTMAS: MIDNIGHT	29
FR. RICHARD G. MALLOY, S.J.	
NATIVITY OF THE LORD: DAY	35
DANIEL P. HORAN, OFM	
HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH	39
FR. JAMES J. GREENFIELD, OSFS	
MARY MOTHER OF GOD	43
MARY ELIZABETH SPERRY	
THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD	47
RICHARD G. MALLOY, S.J.	
BAPTISM OF THE LORD	53
DEACON GREG KANDRA	

LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY	59
DEACON WILLIAM T. DITEWIG, PH.D.	

1 ST SUNDAY OF LENT	63
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH	
2 ND SUNDAY OF LENT	69
ROB BELL	
3 RD SUNDAY OF LENT	75
MARTHA STERNE	
4 TH SUNDAY IN LENT	81
FR. JAMES MARTIN, S.J.	
5 TH SUNDAY OF LENT	85
DAVID A. DAVIS	
PALM SUNDAY	89
PATRICK WENRICK	
HOLY THURSDAY	93
FR. GREG BOYLE, SJ	
GOOD FRIDAY	97
DEACON GREG KANDRA	

EASTER SEASON

EASTER VIGIL	103
MICHAEL DOYLE	
EASTER SUNDAY	107
FR. RICHARD ROHR, OFM	
2 ND SUNDAY OF EASTER	111
DEACON JIM KNIPPER	
3 RD SUNDAY OF EASTER	115
FR. PAUL HOLMES	
4 TH SUNDAY OF EASTER	119
MARY ELIZABETH SPERRY	

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER	123
DEACON WILLIAM T. DITEWIG, PH.D.	
6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER	127
FRAN ROSSI SZPYLCZYN	
7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER	131
FR. DANIEL P. HORAN, OFM	
ASCENSION OF THE LORD	135
MICHAEL DOYLE	
PENTECOST VIGIL	141
ROB BELL	

ORDINARY TIME

2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	147
DAVID A. DAVIS	
3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	153
ROB BELL	
4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	159
DANIEL P. HORAN, OFM	
5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	163
MSGR. WALTER NOLAN	
6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	167
FR. WILLIAM J. BYRON, S.J.	
7TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	171
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH	
8TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	175
REV. CAROL HOWARD MERRITT	
9TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	179
MICHELLE FRANCL-DONNAY	
10TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	183
REV. PENNY NASH	
11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	187
FR. RICHARD ROHR, OFM	

12TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	191
DR. MARGARET BLACKIE	
13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	195
JOEL BLUNK	
14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	201
FR. PAUL HOLMES	
15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	205
FR. JAMES J. GREENFIELD, OSFS	
16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	209
JAMES MARTIN, S.J.	
17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	211
JAN RICHARDSON	
18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	215
REV. PENNY NASH	
19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	219
PATRICK WENRICK	
20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	223
FR. PAUL HOLMES	
21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	227
MICHELLE FRANCL-DONNAY	
22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	231
REV. CAROL HOWARD MERRITT	
23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	235
MICHAEL LEACH	
24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	239
JAMES MARTIN, S.J.	
25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	243
DEACON JIM KNIPPER	
26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	249
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH	
27TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME	255
FR. PAUL HOLMES	

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	259
DEACON GREG KANDRA	
29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	263
FR. RICHARD ROHR, OFM	
30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY	267
CHRISTINE VALTERS PAINTNER	
31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	271
DAVID A. DAVIS	
32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	277
DEACON JIM KNIPPER	
33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	281
REV. PENNY NASH	

FEAST DAYS

MOST HOLY TRINITY	287
RICHARD G. MALLOY, S.J.	
MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST	293
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH	
FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION	297
FR. JAMES J. GREENFIELD, OSFS	
SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS	301
FRAN ROSSI SZPYLCZYN	
FEAST OF ALL SOULS	305
JAN RICHARDSON	
FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION	309
SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL	
CHRIST THE KING	313
FR. RICHARD ROHR, OFM	
THEMATIC CROSS REFERENCE	317
THE CONRTIBUTORS	319
THE CHARITIES	333
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	337

FOREWORD

The spiritual life is not a template; it is a process meant to change our lives. There are stages in the spiritual life that move us from one level to another.

The first is compliance. The Ten Commandments dominate in this phase. Being spiritual in this phase depends on keeping a lists of do's and don'ts, on keeping the "rules"—whatever they are—on being perfect.

This kind of spiritual score keeping is a necessary but very immature stage. We concern ourselves with actions rather than attitudes. We worry about not insulting someone, perhaps, but not about wanting to insult them.

The point is that we don't make choices in this stage. Not real choices. We simply conform or rebel. We do what we're told and call ourselves holy for having done so. We do everything we're told but we never ask ourselves whether or not what we're doing has anything at all to do with the Beatitudes or not.

The second level of the spiritual life is awareness. It has more to do with becoming Christian than it does with going through the rituals of being Christian. This stage of spiritual development awakens in us the awareness that our role as Christian is to help make the world a just and peaceful place. We are not here simply to make ourselves paragons of organizational piety.

At the second level of the spiritual life, we come to realize that though God began the process of Creation it is our responsibility to complete it. Then we set out to become the kind of people we were put on earth to be. We begin to go out of ourselves for the sake of the world rather than simply awarding ourselves gold stars for being regular observers of

ancient rituals. “Do not wish to be called holy before you are holy,” the Desert Monastics taught. It is holiness, not regularity, that we are now about in our spiritual life.

Finally, the third level of the spiritual life is transformation. It requires that we ourselves begin to “put on the mind of Christ.” We ourselves begin to think like the Jesus of the Mount of Beatitudes who in the face of The Ten Commandments required love that was demanding, holier than laws could ever be. We face what it means to be just in an unjust world, meek in an arrogant one, humble in a domineering one, compassionate in a prejudiced one, full of grief for those who suffer from suffering not of their own doing, compassionate for those who are oppressed by the indifferent of this world.

Then the truly spiritual soul sees the world as God sees the world and sets out to make it right.

But that can happen only if we spend our lives immersed in the Scriptures, steeped in its passion for good, conscious of its struggles, in tune with the heart of God.

And how does that happen to us? Answer: It is the function of the Sunday homily to bring us face to face with the Jesus who walked from Galilee to Jerusalem raising women from the dead, curing the sick, contesting with the authorities in the of the poor. And to go and do the same.

And so, this book—a selection of homilies that break open the Christian tradition for our times and our lives. They goad us to compare our lives to the life of Jesus—and to grow into the best of ourselves.

Here begins the fullness of the spiritual life. Listen deeply and believe.

Joan Chittister, OSB
AUGUST 2014

PREFACE

In his homily for the 5th Sunday of Lent, my friend, Pastor Dave Davis, tells the story of a plaque that was located in the church where he first served so many years ago. It was affixed to the back of the pulpit where only the preacher could read the words and, thus, be reminded: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” This is truly the message that comes forth from all congregations to their preacher, their pastor, their minister - that through effective and enriching preaching – they wish to see Jesus.

Church attendance continues to decline, and often the reason given is the congregation’s lack of being spiritually nourished. Indeed, the people who come to church each week want to see Jesus! They want to walk away with a message that opens their lips, hearts and eyes in a Christ-centered fashion. And that is one of the answers I give when asked, “Why did you ever start this series of homiletic books?”

The other reason is to be able to raise money for charities that have been selected to benefit from each book. Through the gifts of each of the talented Contributors under the moniker of the *Homilists for the Homeless* we have been enabled to donate thousands of dollars in order to help feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick. Information on our Contributors, as well as the charities benefitting from this volume, can be found beginning on page XXX.

After dedicating a full chapter in his exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*—The Joy of the Gospel— particular to preaching the Gospel, one cannot doubt the passion which Pope Francis has to effectively spreading the Good News. Long after the end of his papacy, Francis will be one who will be remembered for his love and compassion of those who live on the

margins. While his own homilies are enriching, more importantly, his life has been shown to be one of including others and drawing them near. Recently, he said “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction.”

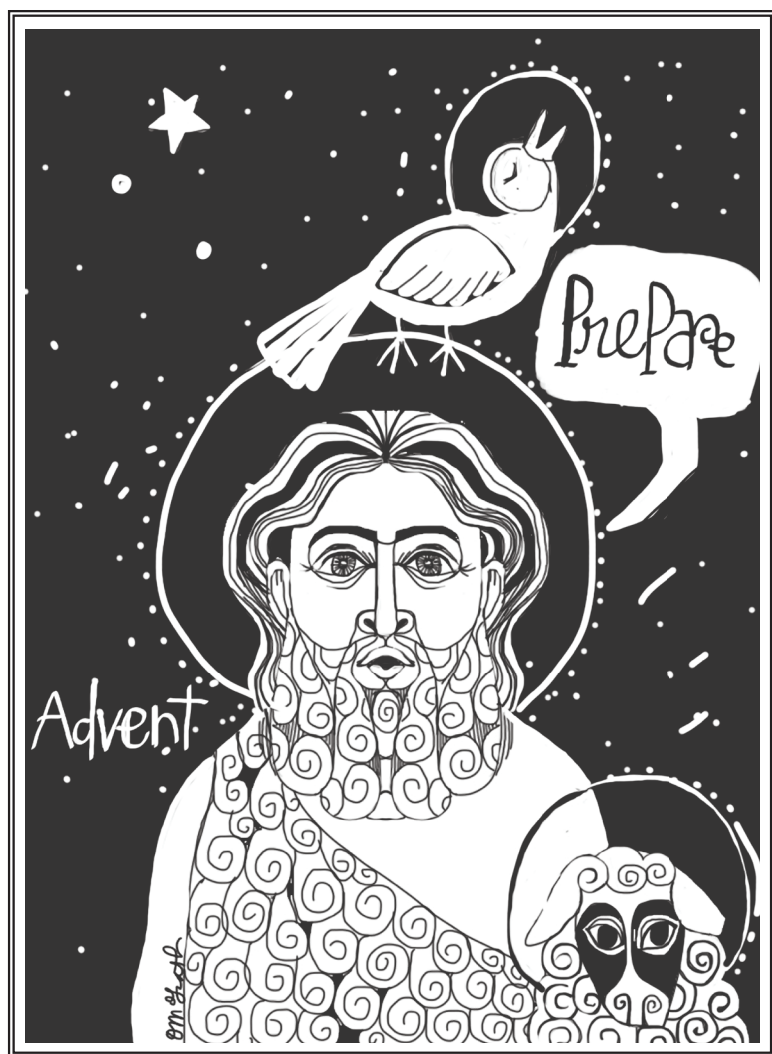
I hope that this book, along with our others, will ‘attract’ our readers to be more open to God’s ever-presence in their lives so that we can fulfill our call to serve the hungry, the naked and the sick in our communities. For this call truly is the ‘Good News’ which Christ preached through his ministry.

May you and those you love be filled with the blessings that go with the gifted words within this volume.

Jim Knipper

08 SEPTEMBER 2014

NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY



ADVENT SEASON

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DEACON GREG KANDRA

ISA. 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7

1 COR. 1:3-9

MARK 13:33-37

“Be watchful, be alert!”

*A*nyone looking for interesting holiday recipes may have stumbled upon a new word which has entered the American lexicon: “Cherpumple.” It’s a dessert, created by Los Angeles writer Charles Phoenix—a diet-destroying, gut-busting feat of cooking that seems guaranteed to induce sugar shock.

It’s basically three different pies, stacked one on top of the other, and baked into one gargantuan “monster pie” with three layers—cherry, pumpkin, and apple, hence the name “cherpumple.” The recipe has swept the internet and has become a sensation on YouTube.

I showed a picture of a “cherpumple” to my wife, and she agreed with me: it’s absolutely disgusting.

Some things just aren’t meant to be mashed together like that.

But I have to wonder if we haven’t done something similar with Advent and Christmas. For all intents and purposes, we have managed to create one massive season—“Chradvent”—which conflates two distinct seasons into one. And it’s beginning earlier and earlier each year.

In mid-November, I was amazed to walk by an apartment in my neighborhood in Queens and see the decked-out lobby, complete with a fully-lit

Christmas tree and wrapped gifts. The day after Thanksgiving, I noticed workers unloading Christmas trees to sell at a nearby flower shop. Even before Thanksgiving, it seems, we've started to celebrate "Chradvent."

Before everyone hops on that "Chradvent" bandwagon, I'd just like to take a moment to celebrate this season which so many have forgotten about—the season of Advent. We need to remember the reason for *this* season, and to hold on to Advent just a little while before surrendering to the craziness of "Chradvent."

The readings on this first Sunday of Advent alert us to something that is about to begin. A guest will arrive when we least expect him. The language is emphatic. "Be watchful, be alert!" Jesus tells his followers not to be caught off guard. His final word in this Gospel could not be more direct: "Watch!" Advent is that time of watching and waiting, of looking and seeking—hope-filled anticipation spread across four weeks.

We symbolize that, and ritualize it, with the Advent wreath. But we don't light all four candles at once. We go one at a time, so the light gathers and grows. If you have an Advent calendar, you don't fold open every window at once, but you go one small window at a time. Later in the season, we will sing the haunting refrain, "O come, O come, Emanuel, and ransom captive Israel..." We are captives awaiting freedom, prisoners held in dungeons of despair. But light is coming. Freedom is coming.

Jesus is coming.

But until he comes, we wait, and watch, and wonder, and pray.

We shouldn't rush it. This season is the time for taking stock, and making plans—a time of great expectations. Dorothy Day, in fact, compared it to a woman expecting a child. "She lives in such a garment of silence," Day wrote, "as though she were listening to hear the stir of life within her."

That brings me to a question all of us should ask during these coming weeks:

Are we listening?

Are we paying attention?

Are we looking to what will be—or are we already there?

If we jump right into the holiday season, we forget to wait, and watch, and wonder, and pray. We neglect the “joyful hope” that is so much a part of this beautiful season. When Christmas arrives, it will seem almost anti-climactic: one more day in a long litany of jingling bells and canned carols.

This year, resist the urge. Wait a while to get the tree or hang the wreath. Turn down the Christmas music. It’s okay: it will be there in the middle of December, just as it was in the middle of November.

Instead, use these weeks to pull back, to retreat from the ho-ho-ho and fa-la-la-la-la. Find time to look within — to pray more deeply, and converse more intimately with the One who is coming. Ask Jesus: *How can I prepare for you? What can I do to welcome you into my life?*

If all of us do that, we may be surprised at the answers.

And we’ll actually be able to hear the answer if we give ourselves over to the “garment of silence” which Dorothy Day wrote about.

“Cherpumple” is over the top, and unhealthy. And so, I think, is “Chrad-vent.” So, do something sensible. Pull the two seasons apart, and live each of them as fully as possible.

Let’s look forward to a merry Christmas.

But let’s also use this opportunity, as well, to enjoy a blessed and holy Advent.

THE CHARITIES

CITIZENS ACTING TOGETHER CAN HELP

CATCH has been a cornerstone and anchor in the South Philadelphia community since 1979. As a well-established and credentialed provider of Community Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Services, CATCH has an ongoing responsibility to serve and to enhance the community at large.

With its mission to provide continuous care on the ladder of independence for individuals with disabilities, CATCH wrestles with the dichotomy of evermore finite and diminishing resources and the community's real and expanding needs for its unique human services.

Newly designed programs continue to strengthen CATCH's base of offerings. There are increased efforts toward the employment of the developmentally disabled; long-term, interventional, emergency, and geriatric resident programs continue throughout the City; ongoing outreach in consultation to brother and sister agencies; and the expanded transportation department specializing in the delivery of residents to medical health care providers are just a few accomplishments of which we are especially cognizant and proud.

www.catchinc.com

HOPEWORKS 'N CAMDEN

Working in one of America's poorest and violent cities, Hopeworks 'N Camden is a non-profit that has been working for over 15 years with Camden youth. Utilizing an advanced training curriculum in website design/development, GIS and Salesforce, Hopeworks works with youth ages 14-23 to get back in school (the estimated high school dropout rate in Camden is close to 70%).

At Hopeworks, justice is connected to brain health. We understand that toxic stress directly impacts the brain health of our youth and our community. Endemic poverty, violence, abuse and neglect lead to toxic situations that directly impact the Camden community, the organizations that work here and all who live here. Hopeworks believes that without addressing the traumatic issues in a youth's life especially as they manifest in habitual patterns of protection i.e. disengagement, disconnected emotional state, anger, emotional eruptions, etc. youth will not be able to take full advantage of opportunities in

their lives. Fundamentally, we can either work on creating new opportunities and “hope that there are youth who can succeed in them” or we can work on helping youth heal who will then be able to take advantage of new opportunities. We are choosing the latter!

As part of our program, Hopeworks runs three businesses, offering a complete array of web site design, development, maintenance and hosting services, along with online mapping products, and a complete set of salesforce administration offerings. These businesses have helped to generate over 450 youth jobs!

<http://www.hopeworks.org/>

RELIGIOUS MINISTRIES PHCS

A partner of Princeton HealthCare System, Religious Ministries PHCS is a community-based non-profit serving the spiritual and emotional needs of the wider Princeton-Plainsboro community through the Medical Center, Princeton House, and Hospice. Working with a multi-faith board of local clergy and community members, the chaplains comfort those who grieve, tend to the souls of those making end-of-life decisions, help patients with cancer find meaning amidst their illness, help those with mental illness find coping skills with their spirituality, and celebrate the gifts of life that are present even in a place of suffering. In addition to providing care to the patients, chaplains also provide support to families and staff, who walk alongside the patients.

<http://www.princetonhcs.org/phcs-home/who-we-serve/patients/pastoral-carereligious-ministries-.aspx>

SAINT CAMILLUS CENTER

The Mission of Saint Camillus Center for Spiritual Care is to accompany people in the midst of suffering with holistic healing and hope. As chaplains we support, affirm, and challenge each other in a spirit of collaboration. We commit ourselves to be Church in its preferential option for the poor in the L.A. County/USC Medical Center.

St Camillus has provided full time and professional interfaith bilingual chaplains to Medical Center since 1855 and we provide 24/7 emergency care to a number of cancer centers in the area. We helped establish the Interfaith Communities United for Justice and we provide support to the East Lake Juvenile Hall near to us.

We provide an accredited interfaith urban clinical pastoral education training program. We make connections between our patients who come as immigrants, uninsured or

underinsured patients along victims of burns, abuse and lack of prenatal or early childhood preventive care.

We appreciate all forms of partnership that empower persons and groups and we practice this in the context of daily interfaith reflection and shared lunch to provide a community of reflection and integration. We value nonviolence in word and action at bedside and in the global struggles. Spirit is respected in various formulations but puts us all into the larger history, picture and world view.

www.stcamilluscenter.org