

Hungry, And You Fed Me

HOMILIES AND REFLECTIONS FOR CYCLE C

EDITED BY DEACON JIM KNIPPER

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The opinions in each homily/reflection do not necessarily represent
the views of the other contributors.

“God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.”

Martin Luther

It is not that the Gospel has changed, it is that we have begun to understand it better. Those who have lived as long as I have...were enabled to compare different cultures and traditions, and know that the moment has come to discern the sign of the times, to seize the opportunity and look far ahead.

Pope John XXIII

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me...Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did for me.’

Matt 25:35-36, 40b

Receive the Gospel of Christ,
whose herald you have become.
Believe what you read,
teach what you believe,
and practice what you teach.

*taken from the Rite of the
Roman Catholic
Diaconate Ordination*

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1	2 ND SUNDAY OF LENT	59
PREFACE	3	MICHAEL LEACH	
ADVENT SEASON		3 RD SUNDAY OF LENT	63
1 ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT	7	FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH	
DAVID A. DAVIS		4 TH SUNDAY OF LENT	69
2 ND SUNDAY IN ADVENT	13	FR. PAUL HOLMES	
FR. PAUL HOLMES		5 TH SUNDAY OF LENT	73
3 RD SUNDAY IN ADVENT	15	FR. PAUL HOLMES	
FRAN ROSSI SZPYLCZYN		PALM SUNDAY	77
4 TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT	19	DEACON GREG KANDRA	
DEACON JIM KNIPPER		HOLY THURSDAY	81
CHRISTMAS SEASON		RICHARD G. MALLOY, S.J.	
NATIVITY OF THE LORD: MIDNIGHT	25	GOOD FRIDAY	85
MICHAEL DOYLE		DEACON GREG KANDRA	
HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY		EASTER SEASON	
AND JOSEPH	29	EASTER VIGIL	91
REV. CAROL HOWARD MERRITT		FR. PAUL HOLMES	
MARY, MOTHER OF GOD	33	EASTER SUNDAY	93
FRAN ROSSI SZPYLCZYN		RICHARD G. MALLOY, S.J.	
THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD	37	2 ND SUNDAY OF EASTER	99
FR. RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M.		FR. PAUL HOLMES	
BAPTISM OF THE LORD	41	3 RD SUNDAY OF EASTER	103
REV. DR. DAVID A. DAVIS		MICHAEL DOYLE	
LENT		4 TH SUNDAY OF EASTER	107
ASH WEDNESDAY	49	FR. RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M.	
DEACON GREG KANDRA		5 TH SUNDAY OF EASTER	111
1 ST SUNDAY OF LENT	53	REV. DR. DAVID A. DAVIS	
REV. DR. DAVID A. DAVIS		6 TH SUNDAY OF EASTER	115
		FRAN ROSSI SZPYLCZYN	

7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER 119
DEACON JIM KNIPPER

ASCENSION OF THE LORD 123
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH

PENTECOST 127
FR. PAUL HOLMES

ORDINARY TIME

2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 131
MICHAEL DOYLE

3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 135
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH

4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 141
DEACON GREG KANDRA

5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 145
REV. CAROL HOWARD MERRITT

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 149
FR. PAUL HOLMES

7TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 153
REV. PENNY A. NASH

8TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 157
JOEL BLUNK

9TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 163
PENNY NASH

10TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 167
MICHAEL LEACH

11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 171
FR. PAUL HOLMES

12TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 173
DEACON JIM KNIPPER

13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 177
FR. RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M.

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 181
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH

15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 185
MICHAEL DOYLE

16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 191
DEACON JIM KNIPPER

17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 197
FR. RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M.

18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 201
RICHARD G. MALLOY, S.J.

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 205
DEACON GREG KANDRA

20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 209
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 213
REV. CAROL HOWARD MERRITT

22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 217
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 223
FR. PAUL HOLMES

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 227
FRAN ROSSI SZPYLCZYN

25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 231
DEACON JIM KNIPPER

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 235
MSGR. WALTER NOLAN

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 239
REV. PENNY A. NASH

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 243
JOEL BLUNK

29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 247
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH

30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	251
RICHARD G. MALLOY, S.J.	
31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	255
FR. RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M.	
32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	259
FR. RICHARD ROHR, O.F.M.	
33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME	263
REV. PENNY A. NASH	

FEAST DAYS

MOST HOLY TRINITY	269
REV. CAROL HOWARD MERRITT	
MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST	273
MSGR. WALTER NOLAN	
FEAST OF ALL SAINTS	277
JAMES MARTIN, S.J.	
ALL SOULS DAY	283
FR. WILLIAM BAUSCH	
OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING	287
DEACON JIM KNIPPER	
THEMATIC CROSS REFERENCE	291
THE CONTRIBUTORS	293
THE CHARITIES	303
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	307

FOREWORD

Who doesn't like a good story? Count Christians among those who do.

Christians are storytelling people. We're descendants of story-telling people on all sides of the family, from the ancient Hebrews to pagan converts. We're formed by stories, many of which are cautionary tales embedded in the narrative, poetry, psalms, and parables that comprise our Holy Scripture.

Storytelling is central to the practical understanding of our faith. Think about it: the very structure of our worship includes time to retell our stories. It also includes time to tell stories *about* those stories before we come to the table of the Lord.

Sometimes we listen and get the message right away. More often than not, we need to hear the same story again and again before meaning emerges. Even then, meaning morphs over time. What we once took as literal eventually transcends the mundane. Conversely, what we once dismissed—or blissfully embraced—as metaphor may become staggeringly real. Shallow soil. Multiplying fish. Mustard seeds. Pearls. Strangers healed. Storms calmed. Death vanquished.

Spiritual meaning and the practical value of our holy stories emerge as we grow in faith, as we engage in spiritual practice such as *lectio divina*, and also as the result of listening to (or reading) how others interpret scripture.

Hungry, And You Fed Me: Homilies and Reflections for Cycle C is a collection of stories about our stories crafted by superb storytellers. Here, we're invited to engage with scripture at a deeper level by people of abiding faith whose work and words are grounded in theological education and active ministry.

The authors herein are teachers inviting us to contemplate what these ancient stories have to do with contemporary life. They breathe new life into these familiar passages from scripture and inspire us to put into our faith into action—seeing God in all things, seeing Christ in one another, living the Gospel.

Homilists often talk about sermon preparation as “breaking open the Word,” but really it’s the Word that breaks us open and then holds the promise of making us whole. For the glory of God.

Meredith Gould, PhD

PREFACE

I have been fortunate throughout most of my life to enjoy the fruits of great homilists—whether it was growing up in Colts Neck and listening to Fr. Bill Bausch, or at the University of Scranton enjoying the wisdom of the Jesuits, or in my home parish having our pastor, Msgr. Walt Nolan warming the congregation with one of his many homiletic stories.

As a deacon in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey, I'm passionate about great homilies. For those of us privileged to preach, homilies provide us a unique opportunity to break open the gospel message. Over the past decade, through various occasions and contacts, I've been blessed to encounter Christian clergy and laity who are gifted with the ability to spark transformation by touching people's lives through their homilies, sermons, and reflections.

A year ago I launched this project, leading me to eventually reach out to a dozen men and women who are some of the best of the best when it comes to breaking open the Word of God. My goal was to compile and edit a book that would feed the heart and souls of the readers and act as a vehicle to raise money to feed the hungry and homeless. My hope and prayer is that this book does both.

Under the moniker of Homilists for the Homeless, these writers and preachers have generously donated their material so that proceeds from this book can be given to the four charities selected for this volume. This first of three books begins with Cycle C of the Lectionary for Mass, which starts the First Sunday of Advent 2012 (and every three years thereafter).

As Christians we are called to use the gifts that God has given each of us. Called to spread the good news of Christ. Called to reach out to those

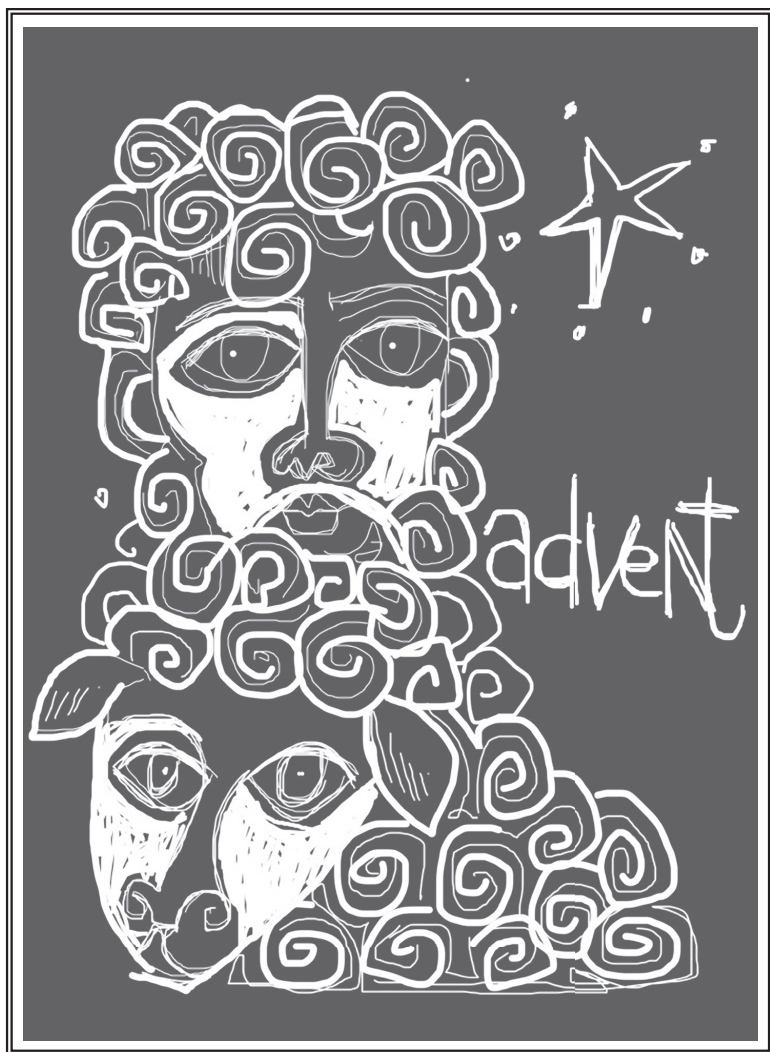
who live on the margins. Called to clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and feed the hungry.

May these gifted words do exactly that and bring blessings to you and yours,

Jim Knipper

21 September 2012

Feast of St. Matthew, the evangelist



ADVENT SEASON

1ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

DAVID A. DAVIS

JER. 33:14-16

THES. 3:12-4:2

LUKE 21:25-36

“Be vigilant at all times.”

One of my *earliest memories* of school days when I was a child comes from a morning in first or second grade when we had to prepare a Peterson’s Writing Specimen—a half-sheet of white paper, wide-lined, the class writing a series of letters and words in cursive, using ballpoint pens. Our very best effort in penmanship would then be sent away to the Peterson people who would send back the best in the class for proper accolades. I worked very carefully and did the best I could, the best ever, and I came to the end and had to sign my name. Bottom right, last line, I signed “David...David” I had to start all over. I was crushed. The second paper wasn’t as good. I had to rush. Truth is, that one half-sheet of paper was the best penmanship of my life. My handwriting has never been any better; in fact, it has continually, over 40-some years, only become worse. My elementary school handwriting do-over.

Look around the sanctuary this morning. It looks, it sounds, it *feels* like Advent. Wreaths. Purple. Banners. Hymns. Familiar biblical texts. Tree lighting in Palmer Square. Horse-drawn carriage rides around town. Crowds for shopping. The Salvation Army bell-ringer. Counting days until Christmas. Here we go again! Advent I. The First Sunday of Advent. The beginning of the new year when it comes to the church calendar: Advent. Christmas. Epiphany. Lent. Holy Week. Good Friday. Easter. Eastertide. Pentecost. Birth of Jesus. Life of Jesus. Death of Jesus. Resurrection.

Holy Spirit...and back again. Here we go again. Come, O Come Emmanuel! Come Thou Long Expected Jesus! Even so, Come Lord Jesus! Advent. One big do-over! A re-write for those in English class. A mulligan for the golfers. In Harry Potter, yet another book. In music, a reprise... the return to the first notes of the melody. It's Advent. Here we go...again.

But it doesn't get any better. I'm not talking about our singing, or the opportunities here at the church, or the artwork, or how we do our worship, or one year's theological theme compared to another, or how well we teach and include our children, or how we do in welcoming newcomers this time of year, or when it comes to lifting up mission and outreach opportunities and God's call to us to be the body of Christ in the world. None of that is what I mean when I say it doesn't get any better. You know what I mean—life, the world, the struggles, the suffering, the kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven kind of thing. The big picture out there, maybe in here (in the heart)...it doesn't get any better. Advent and this do-over thing!!

Most every year when we get to this Sunday, this First Sunday of Advent, the gospel reading tells of the teaching of Jesus regarding the Coming of the Son of Man. As in this morning's reading from Luke. "They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory...be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." Jesus and his Second Coming. You recognize that Advent theme. We've been here so many times before; celebrating again the birth of Jesus while looking in faith to his coming again! In betwixt and between, the already and the not yet. Must be Advent.

The Coming of the Son of Man. The Second Coming of Jesus. The reference to Christ's coming again on Advent I, it always comes with this apocalyptic flair. You heard it in the reading: "Signs in the sun, the moon,

and the stars...distress among the nations, the roaring of the sea, fear and foreboding, the powers of the heavens will be shaken...don't let that day catch you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth." And preachers and teachers go to great lengths to try to explain biblical, apocalyptic literature, and the parallels to the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation, and the history rooted in the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem and the already and the not yet of biblical prophecy in the context of the unique genre of apocalyptic, complete with warnings against those who want to predict and sell books and go political and decide who gets to go and who is left behind. Preachers and teachers like me go to great lengths to try to explain apocalyptic literature in the Bible every year, every Advent, every time we go through this again. Every do-over.

When you stop and think about it, such apocalyptic consciousness is not just about biblical literature. Nor is it only in video games and fantasy novels. More than 6,000 American soldiers have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 30,000 American men and women have been wounded. Civilian casualties in Iraq alone as a result of war and ongoing internal violence by some estimates exceeded 200,000. South Africa is a nation of 45 million people. In 2007 5.7 million were infected with HIV/AIDS. According to US Census statistics, 39.8 million people in 2008 lived in poverty. 14.1 million of those were children. 1 in 5 children in the United States live in poverty. Statistics of apocalyptic proportions. Words with apocalyptic connotations are everywhere. Words like rampage, surge, violence. Workplace, family, random violence, war on drugs, pandemic. And the genre and language of the apocalyptic has made a rousing debut in the healthcare debate coming from every side of the aisle. Preachers don't prime your apocalyptic imagination. The world already takes care of that.

It's never that far from home, either, far from life in here, I mean. Every time we gather as the Body of Christ, you know there is someone whose daily battle is beyond description, someone who is living a story of endurance and perseverance, a family who is pinning the needle in struggle, someone labeled a "surviving spouse." Every time we come here there are words from your life and mine that start to sound like this biblical literature—they start to sound apocalyptic: reduction in force, downsized, metastatic, Alzheimer's, credit crisis, hospice, long term care, chronic pain, rock bottom, despair. I guess what I am trying to say is that the longer I serve in pastoral ministry the less I think I have to explain the literature of apocalyptic. You already know; not because of movies or video games or the evening news or politics but because of life. Life out there and life in here. Life and how when Advent comes around, yeah—it doesn't seem to be getting any better.

When these things take place, Jesus said, when that's how it feels, when the Advent do-over just isn't working...right then, stand up and raise your head, because your redemption is drawing near. Your redemption. Your salvation. Your liberation. Your forgiveness. Your new life. Your resurrection hope. Your life forever in the kingdom of God. It is drawing near. God draws near. Jesus draws near. Not just because the calendar marches on, not just because we're on the clock, but because life happens. Not because we've come around to Advent again, but because once again we come to Advent with a certain fullness to life that demands and cries out for the very fullness of God.

Stand up. Raise your head. Your redemption is drawing near. God draws near. Jesus draws near. Not just then, now. Stand up. Raise your head, not just to see the horizon, but to experience his presence now. The difference between apocalyptic fantasy in film, a fascination with post-apocalyptic survival—the difference between all of that and the apoca-

lyptic promise of God, is the tense, the timing, the real presence of Christ Jesus when life is happening now.

Real presence. Christ is present here, just as he promised. “I am here. This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you.” Forgiveness. Liberation. Salvation. Redemption. Take. Eat. Drink. Stand up. Raise your head. Jesus nears. The sacramental, apocalyptic promise of God.

If you were to gather all this literature of scripture together, all the apocalyptic writings of scripture, one collector’s set, special edition, it would of course end with the Book of Revelation. And right at the end, before the benediction that concludes the Book of Revelation, right before “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.” Right there at the end, Revelation 22:20—“Come, Lord Jesus!” (“Even so, come Lord Jesus” in the King James.)

Come, Lord Jesus. It’s not a victory shout. It’s not a political slogan that paves the way for four more years. It’s not a billboard or a movie trailer intended for an endtime scenario. It’s a gut wrenching, heart felt plea. A prayer. Dare we say it, a demand! Come, Lord Jesus. A prayer for the Advent do-over, especially when it’s not getting any better. Not getting any better—you know what I mean. Come Lord Jesus. It is not “come and finish this all up!” It is “come, now, quickly, come right now!”