

## Chaplain's Bulletin December 18, 2022



Dear Folks,

In the Gospel of Luke, we get the Angel Gabriel coming to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and in the Gospel of Matthew, we get things from St. Joseph's perspective. In both stories the angel says, "Do not be afraid." I'm told the Bible has the admonition "Do not be afraid" 365 times. If we read the stories, we find it is not because the path will be smooth, painless, and safe that we should not fear, but because God is in charge and will make wonderful things happen. Mary and Joseph certainly did not have an easy time, but I'm quite certain that they would tell you that it was infinitely worth what they went through.

When God is starting to do something great, it often begins with something small, and several times, with the birth of a baby. We see in the stories of Isaac, Samuel, Sampson, John the Baptist, and most of all Jesus, it begins with a birth announcement.

Babies are incredibly helpless, but parents testify that they take over the whole household, and everything revolves around them. Their mighty power comes from how they evoke love from people. Parents have testified how they look at them and the love just rushes forth. Their very helplessness draws something from us. They are so full of mystery and potential, and they strengthen our hope. I have been in very tragic situations where the family was in great anguish, but when someone held the baby, there was a smile and a moment of joy. Carl Sandburg said, "A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on."

This teaches us something about Jesus. When He was helplessly nailed hand and foot to the cross, He was winning the greatest of all victories, the victory over evil itself. When He was most helpless was precisely when He was most powerful. Such is the paradox of Christianity. He saves us, drawing us out of our helplessness and sin, and enabling us to become creatures of love. St. Paul found that in his own life, as he relates a conversation with God: "but he said to me, 'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I would rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell within me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)."

During this season when we celebrate our Lord becoming a baby, we can get quite stubborn in our hope. We decorate with lights in the darkest of winter. We want to give gifts where there is want. Many can generate a bit of joy where they normally could not. During my annual reading of "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, it struck me how the ghost of Christmas present showed people in poverty and squalor who still had a Christmas thought and would share a Christmas greeting, and perhaps hummed a Christmas hymn. There is a power there that circumstances cannot destroy. Such is the power of that Baby born in Bethlehem. However disappointing our year may have been, whatever we are struggling with now, God is at work, and let our hope be sharpened by the Lord who once slept in an animal's feeding trough. He is the Light that the darkness cannot overcome (John 1:5).

Blessings,

Fr. Jim