

Homily
December 25, 2024
Midnight Mass
53:20 – 1:04

A few hours ago, Pope Francis in St. Peter's Basilica, opened the Holy Year Door. We're embarking upon the year 2025. Every 25 years, we have a "usual" Holy Year. This year has been designated "The Year of Hope." Heaven knows, our world needs that right now. Our world, our neighborhood, our nation – we need that sense of hope.

Now, hope is longing for something we cannot see. If we saw it and grasped it, it is no longer hope.

It IS.

But what leads us to hope is our experience of God in our lives and the experience of others over the centuries. When God has made a promise, it engenders that hope. And we have seen the promises again and again fulfilled. That's why we're here tonight.

Throughout this season of Advent we have heard prophet after prophet, as well as Titus, who we heard in our Second Reading, proclaim some reason for hope. Titus in the reading makes it very clear. "As we await the joyful hope, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Does that sound familiar? It's part of our liturgy. We'll hear it later, after the Our Father.

Tonight we celebrate the First Coming. But we still await the Second Coming, that is, the End Time, when the Lord will reign – not just "kind of," but fully.

And in between is the Church, which is supposed to be a sign of hope. And each member here, each of us, we are one of those signs of hope. We are to reveal it, that it might be seen as real and true and worth longing for.

During Advent we heard from the prophet Baruch, not one we hear from very often. He lived in the 2nd Century, B.C., in a time of very difficult Greek rulers. He said something similar to what the prophet Isaiah said, "Every mountain will be made low. Every valley filled-in."

This was spoken to people who need to come home and to those who return -- all the obstacles will be set aside. It's that time when God makes it possible to clear the obstacles.

In our time, we have obstacles, don't we? We have personal obstacles, of course. But more so, we see obstacles throughout the world that keep people from having that sense of hope. Or diminishing it.

But God has promised, made it very clear: The obstacles will be set aside and the way will be smooth for our personal or world obstacles.

Then there was Zephaniah, another one of those prophets. And he, like Paul in the Philippians reading on the Third Sunday, told us to “Rejoice!” Remember that? Did you rejoice? You did! Was it an easy decision? – For the most part.

Did you ever want to rejoice, but you feel so glum, it’s just not happening? Zephaniah suggests that what we need to do is to rejoice by being thankful for what we have already experienced in our lives and in the lives of our ancestors.

God’s working. God’s caring for us, through prayer, sacraments or through someone around us. In our lives the hand of God touched us and made it possible to acknowledge our loss or our grief, or the obstacles. By recalling, we can rejoice.

If we’re a rejoicing people, that will engender and build the hope that is so much needed.

And finally, we heard Micah. We only hear Micah once a year. And this time he talks about Bethlehem-Ephrathah, from you shall come a great ruler, who will be a prince of peace, as we heard in Isaiah. From the insignificant little town of Bethlehem. Have you ever been to Bethlehem? I don’t mean Pennsylvania.

I haven’t either, but I’ve read enough to know that Bethlehem, especially in the ancient world, was a back-water sort of place. It was very insignificant. And because it was excellent grazing area around it, there were a lot of sheep.

Have you ever been around a lot of sheep? You haven’t? Anybody here? They stink. It’s an odor you cannot believe. My sister Franny and her husband Garrett live in a small town. It’s called Severance, outside of Fort Collins. And there are sheep farms in that area. Oy veh! It’s unbelievable.

From this place will come that Savior, a righteous, peaceful king who will lead the people to hope.

As I said in the beginning, we need this year of hope. We need it very badly. And it’s a gift that we’ve been called to have this year, in this time.

I would suggest that we can do some of the things that we’ve been invited throughout this season. We can look for that which to be thankful. We can look for that which can be a possibility through you and I letting people see that we’re involved. That we make a decision that we are going to help bring about something that we can actually do.

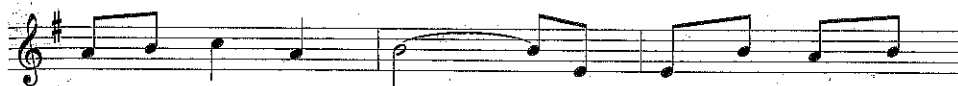
We can't fix the whole world, can we? We can barely fix our cars anymore. We can in our own workplace, where we are "the king," can rule justly, lead people in a way that lifts them up.

There is a wonderful hymn. It's an Advent hymn called, "Each Winter As the World Grows Older," number 419 in the hymnal. Would you take that up, please? 4-1-9. I invite us to sing this tonight and let it sum-up what the Word has given us during this season of Advent and now into this Christmas season and into the New Year upon which we embark.

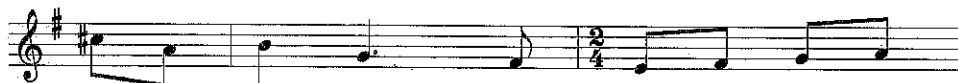
Each Winter As the Year Grows Older 419



1. Each win - ter as the year grows old - er, We
 2. When race and class cry out for trea - son, When
 3. Yet I be - lieve be - yond be - liev - ing, That
 4. So e - ven as the sun is turn - ing, To
 5. O Child of ec - sta - sy and sor - rows, O



each grow old - er too. The chill sets in a
 si - rens call for war, They o - ver - shout the
 life can spring from death; That growth can flow - er
 jour - ney to the north, The liv - ing flame, in
 Prince of peace and pain, Bright - en to - day's world



lit - tle cold - er; The ver - i - ties we
 voice of rea - son, And scream till we ig -
 from our griev - ing; That we can catch our
 se - cret burn - ing, Can kin - dle on the
 by to - mor - row's, Re - new our lives a -



knew Seem shak - en and un - true.
 nore All we held dear be - fore.
 breath And turn trans - fixed by faith.
 earth, And bring God's love to birth.
 gain; Lord Je - sus, come and reign!