

## **Advent 1-C**

**Parish Visit of St. Edmund's**

2 December 2018

Dear Father Jerry, Father Vincent, Deacon Richard, and dear brothers and sisters in Christ of St. Edmund's Parish:

### ***Introduction***

As many of you know, beginning on Friday morning I began a visit of your parish which concludes this morning.

For me, the experience of meeting so many people who are engaged in the life of your parish family gives concrete witness that your community is flourishing under the shepherding guidance of your pastor, Father Jerry, with the dedicated help of Father Vincent, and your wonderful staff – and here I single out Lynn in particular – and countless volunteers.

During the past two days I have spent most of the time visiting with nearly every parish group. Here parishioners of all ages are involved in one ministry or another. During our meetings, I heard of their contributions to building up the community, often over many years of service, and I offered my own observations on certain questions that came up in our discussion.

I am also enormously grateful to the wonderful hospitality offered, to all those who organized the visit. It is always a challenging chore to get so many people together. And to those of you who took the time to come together, I thank you most sincerely.

At the end of my visit I will send Father de Souza a report, but let me note this morning just a few things that stood out during my time with you.

First of all, you are blessed to have an outstanding school as an integral part of your parish, as the privileged, though not the only, place for the education of your children. Your school will continue to flourish because of the extraordinary way in which it is carrying out its mission, under the leadership of your principal who is supported by an outstanding staff and teachers and a topnotch Parish Education Committee. The school Mass which began the visit was a beautiful occasion which I shall long remember.

It was also extremely gratifying to learn that you are looking to the future in order to implement the best way to ensure that the children are in a school which meets the seismic safety requirements that are called for. Such a project is a daunting task but, with the cooperation of the entire parish family, a successful project will come to completion.

Secondly, I remain impressed by how intentional and proud you all are of your parish family, especially because of the presence of the Carmelite Friars. Their spirituality imbues the parish with a prayerful sense that is palpable and fosters the active participation of all parishioners in the liturgy. Indeed, your congregation sings more heartily than most in the Archdiocese.

Thirdly, I have been inspired by the many opportunities and initiatives available so that you can be personally engaged in one or more of the ministries offered. There are too many to mention here by name, but you all know that a parish cannot fulfill its evangelizing mission unless everyone lends their hand

There are countless spiritual gifts and talents present among you, and for this we should all give the Lord thanks for such abundance. But allow me one word of encouragement to everyone who comes to Mass here at St. Edmund's but is not yet involved or only peripherally so. I urge you to become more engaged – or engaged for the first time – in making your contribution to building up the Body of Christ through your active involvement in one or more of the parish ministries, activities, associations, and organizations. If you have remained a little on the sidelines, give serious thought to finding a ministry where the Lord can use your gifts and talents for his service and the service of your brothers and sisters.

Welcoming new members to your organizations and planning on succession to your ministry deserves everyone's attention. Everyone should ask himself or herself: who will take my place in my ministry in five or ten years? Inviting others to share in your ministry, especially those who are younger, and being willing to accommodate new ideas is the mark of a parish family that is prospering.

Lastly, I would like to share with you an observation from Pope Francis when he describes his expectations of what a parish should be concentrating on today. In his exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel,” he describes the 21<sup>st</sup> century parish in a way which stresses its role as a community of disciples who live the Gospel and a community of missionaries who share this Good News with others. Here’s what he wrote:

The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is . . . a centre of constant missionary outreach.<sup>1</sup>

It is the Holy Father’s hope, as it is mine, that St. Edmund’s, with its history of over a century here on the North Shore, will ever more be such a community of disciples and friends of Jesus whose Christian witness leads others to experience the love and mercy of God revealed in the teaching, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

## *Advent*

Today, as you already know, the Church is celebrating the first Sunday of Advent, marking the beginning of new liturgical year.

The fascinating mystery of God-with-us, indeed, of the God who became one of us, is what we shall be celebrating in the coming weeks as we journey towards Christmas. During the season of Advent the Church takes us by the hand and enables us to experience once again the joyful expectation of the Lord's coming to his people long ago, and to us today.

Advent, then, speaks to us of two “comings” of Jesus into the world. On the one hand, it raises our eyes towards the final destination of humanity's pilgrimage through history, which is the glorious return of the Lord Jesus. On the other hand, we look forward to celebrating his Birth in Bethlehem. As Christians, our hope is turned to the future but remains firmly rooted in an event of the past.<sup>2</sup>

The readings for today's Mass place before us that advent of the “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Lk 21:27) – when Jesus will come again, this time to bring all human history to a close in the final judgment of the world. Such a “coming” can be more than a little scary.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (27 November 2005).

In fact, Jesus calls us to “be alert at all times!” (Lk 21:36). It is an appeal addressed to everyone, because each one of us, at a time known to God alone, will be called to account for his life before the judgment seat of God.

### ***Not Fear, but Hope***

But Advent is not the season of fear but of hope.

Our hope as Christians is founded on trust in the Merciful Father who “so loved the world that he gave his Only Son” (Jn 3:16), so that men and women might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10). Advent, therefore, is a favourable time for recalling that our hope is reliable because it is “anchored” in Christ, who made his dwelling with us as true God and true man.

The Advent Liturgy assures us that God has not forgotten us but that he does indeed “come” to us. He came among us, born in Bethlehem, but he also “comes” to be with us today in every situation of our life, the good times and the bad. He dwells among us, he lives with us and within us.<sup>3</sup>

During this season of hope we turn especially to Mary as our companion on the journey. At the Annunciation, when she said, “Let what you have said be done to me” (Lk 1:38), she was saying: “I and

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (3 December 2006).

know what this all means, but I trust that good things will happen.”<sup>4</sup>

Mary believed, and she invites us to believe and trust in God’s goodness and faithfulness. She gave up control over her own future and let God define her life. She was willing to let him set the agenda, for she trusted that he leads us according to his love, casting out our fear. Mary hoped in God and leads us to hope.

### ***Conclusion***

May this Holy Mass strengthen your hope that the good Lord will draw this parish and every parishioners to be closer to him day by day so that your celebration of his Birth will be filled with joy and that you will await his Coming in glory with expectation.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope*, 105.