**Bishop Bradley’s Reflections on the Sunday Readings**

December 4, 2016 Second Sunday of Advent

We are certainly moving further into this brief and beautiful Advent Season, and, of course at the same time, drawing closer to the Feast of Christmas. As we prepare for Christmas, there is a lot of “dreaming” and “hoping” taking place about what gifts to buy our friends and loved ones, or maybe even about what gifts we might receive. However, as we all know, the perfect Christmas gift came already for all the Western Michigan Bronco fans who won the MAC Championship on Friday night and maintained a perfect season of 13 – 0. Congratulations to all the players, staff and coaches for being a true inspiration of perseverance and pursuing their dream/goal of perfection. Now they wait to see if their dream of playing in the Cotton Bowl, and winning, completes the fairytale season.

In the midst of our joy for the Broncos and our preparations for Christmas, we still need to make the effort to maintain a focus on Advent as we spiritually prepare our hearts for the most important reason to celebrate Christmas, the celebration of Jesus’ Birth. The word “Advent” comes from the Latin “*ad*” and “*venire*”, and means “coming”. That is why we reflect on, and try to be prepared for, the One Who is coming! There are different kinds of “comings”. There is the **original Advent**----the thousands of years when the world “waited” for generations for the coming of the Messiah just as we heard so beautifully in our First Reading today from the “Advent Prophet”, Isaiah. This is one of the most beautiful passages in the Scriptures. This passage could be known as the “Shall” Passage, because in these 10 brief verses, the word “shall” is used 21 times, as Isaiah urges us to keep focused on his Dream----to what we should keep looking forward----anticipating----hoping. Isaiah’s dream, or vision, of what the “Day of the Lord” will be like: when justice, peace and harmony will be the *norm*---when all things will be the way God intends them to be!

Then, of course, after Jesus was born, there was the **30-Year Advent**  from the time of Jesus’ Birth until He began His public ministry. We hear about that in today’s Gospel Passage, when John the Baptist comes on the scene----the Advent figure *par excellence*-----whose role is just to “*Prepare the way for the Lord*”. John was pointing the crowd away from himself to the One for Whom he was unworthy to even unfasten his sandals.

So, here we are in the beginning of the Second Week of Advent 2016. Jesus has come! He is here! He has preached His Gospel, the Good News of Salvation. He has suffered, died, and rose, thereby saving the world from itself---saving us from our sins. He has established the Church, whose mission it is to “Go forth and proclaim the Good News to all the world.”

However, that dream----that vision----that “Shall Passage” is not yet a reality. The wolf and the lamb, the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear are still enemies; there is still war, violence, injustice, and poverty in the world.

On Friday I had the privilege of participating in the Memorial Mass held at St. Ann Parish in Gull Lake/Augusta for Colin Rose, the young Wayne State University Canine Police Officer who was shot and killed while on duty last week in Detroit. His funeral Mass and burial was held in Detroit on Thursday, but a Memorial Mass was celebrated at his home parish of St. Ann’s where his parents, all of his family and close friends still live. It was a profoundly moving experience to see the church filled to capacity and to have hundreds of police and safety officers and First Responders from all over this area in attendance to pay tribute to their fallen brother in blue. To see the impact of such a terrible act of violence on the hundreds of people who came together for this Mass reminds us that violence is destructive far beyond those immediate victims who suffer. We pray for Collin’s eternal rest and reward; we pray for his fiancée Nikki; we pray for his parents, brother, and all his family and dear friends. But we also give thanks for the gift of our faith which helps us to cope with such violence and put it into some bigger context and, with God’s grace, to find the strength to continue living in Hope that one day---“*on the Day of the Lord”---* Isaiah’s dream will be fully realized.

And so, in a sense, we live in an **ongoing “Advent**”. We are no longer waiting for God to come to us; rather, we wait---hope----dream of the day when we----*all* of humanity----will come to God. We pray for the day when humanity will “get it”, when *we* will choose to accept God’s ways----to embrace God’s gift of salvation.

Advent is only four weeks in our calendar. But in many ways, it lasts until the world heeds God’s call to live together in harmony, unity, justice and peace. It lasts until we refuse to allow sin to control our daily actions and choices. It lasts until we not only recognize Jesus, the Messiah, present here among us, present most especially here in the Eucharist, but when we embrace Him, pattern our lives on His, and accept His gifts of forgiveness, salvation and reconciliation.

It lasts until we hear St. Paul’s words in today’s Second Reading and live according to them: “*Welcome one another as Christ welcomed you for the glory of God.”*

Advent is a beautiful, liturgical season, but it’s also a lifelong journey. That is one of the reasons why I chose my Episcopal Motto: “*Waiting in Joyful Hope”* because it helps to describe the way we should live our lives*.* We live in a spirit of “waiting” for the **final Advent**----the Final Coming of the Lord at the end of all time, or at the end of our lives, whichever comes first. As we move deeper into this liturgical Advent season, let us ask our Loving God to help each of us *live* in Advent hope, and one day, rejoice in our ultimate Christmas Joy!

God bless you, now and always.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley