

Dear Parishioners,

It is strange that we only have a single day to celebrate the Fourth Week of Advent this year. The Fourth Week of Advent begins on Saturday evening, December 23, at sunset and ends on Sunday, December 24, Christmas Eve, at Sunset. Please take careful note: **SUNDAY MORNING MASS IS ONLY FOR THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT, IT IS NOT A CHRISTMAS MASS.** In the same way, **THE MASS AT 5:00 PM SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, DOES NOT FULFILL THE OBLIGATION FOR THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT.** In other words, those of us who are devout about celebrating the Eucharist as we are obliged will go to Mass twice this weekend, **AND WE WILL LOVE IT (OR ELSE!).**

Seriously, I do hope our celebrations of the Fourth Week of Advent and Christmas will be meaningful, joyful and enriching for us. I understand the inconvenience of it all, and would probably appreciate it more if things could be arranged in a more convenient way. As they say, though, "no one ever said it was supposed to be easy." I have found that when life is challenging I have grown most by facing the challenges head on and doing my best to work my way through them.

The Prophet Micah, in the first reading for this Fourth Week of Advent, foretells the coming of the Messiah who will rescue Israel from all her suffering and pain. At the very end of the reading, Micah says this about the Messiah, "*he shall be peace.*" This foretelling of the Messiah gave the Israelites tremendous hope and his prophecy encouraged them to remain faithful, even in the face of all the challenges before them.

When we read the gospels and see how Jesus ministered to people, we see that he certainly was their peace. To those who were ostracized, condemned as sinners, and hated he offered forgiveness. To those who suffered from sickness and pain he offered healing. To those whose lives were cursed by persecution and hatred he offered the good news of God's love. In other words, to all who suffered, Jesus, the Christ, gave peace.

This peace is something far greater than the absence of war and violence, fighting and hate; it is the gift that enables us to be calm, resolute, and committed to our faith even when we face difficult challenges in our lives.

We as a nation are at war, peace is absent from our lives because we have loved ones who are at grave risk in war zones. They are fighting to defend people who are the targets of hate and terror. And Christ is our peace calling us to be peaceful people.

- We seek his mercy and compassion for any sins our nation has committed in contributing to this horrible situation.
- We seek his comfort and compassion knowing the dangers our loved ones face.
- We seek to hear the good news of God's love for us, for our enemies, for all sinful humanity.
- We pray for peace that will enable us to be faithful people in this most challenging of times.

I truly pray that this Christmas we will be filled with a spirit of joy as we celebrate the birth of our Lord who brings us the gift of eternal salvation and blesses our lives with his peace.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel