

HOMILY ~ SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT DECEMBER 9/10, 2023

*Making your way in the world today
Takes everything you got.
Taking a break from all your worries
Sure would help a lot.
Wouldn't you like to get away?*

*Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name.
And they're always glad you came.
You wanna be where you can see
Our troubles are all the same.
You wanna be where everybody knows your name.*

How many people remember the TV show “*Cheers*?” I always thought it would be really great to have a place like that to go where people of all walks of life could go, where you felt at home, you felt accepted, where you felt like you belong. How many of us have a place like that?

In the Gospel Reading today, we meet John the Baptist. He is also calling people to a Baptism of repentance. Repentance can be defined as a sincere regret or remorse and turning toward a God-honoring way of life. This is the way he is telling us to “*Prepare the way of the Lord.*” One of the things that I regret is all of the hatred, divisions and violence we have in our culture. I know Jesus never had this in mind for us. I would be a little frustrated if I were Jesus. If I were Jesus, I think I would be saying, “*I went to earth as one of them in a human form. I taught them how to live by preaching and by my example. I died on the cross for all of their sins, even the ones they had not committed yet. I inspired the evangelists to write it all down for them in Sacred Scripture. I told them that the law and the prophets could all be summed up with the new commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And 2,000 years later, they still do not get it.*” This Advent, I think we need to work toward a world of peace and harmony where people love and respect each other.

Let's go back to “*Cheers*.” Turns out that “*Cheers*” is a good example of places that social scientists have been studying for years. There was a lot written about them in the 1990's. They called them *Third Places*. These are places that are not home and are not work, where there is informal interaction with a diversity of people and where you have repeated interaction with the same people. Social scientists see *Third Places* as very important for our well-being. The more interactions that we have with different people increases our

happiness. *Third Places* give us a place where we feel we belong, and Maslow tells us that this is one of our basic needs. As we get to know people, we start to watch out for them; and crime decreases as a result. This expands into our communities. We also have people that we can ask for help when we need it. The diversity of people that we encounter is enriching, and it helps us to understand different points of view. This leads to a place of peace and harmony where people love and respect each other. This also leads to an increase in acts of loving kindness.

Social scientists tell us that *Third Places* have been decreasing since television became wide spread. People started staying home and watching TV. We develop pseudo relationships with the actors, the characters and the newscasters. We feel as if we know them, but we do not. That expanded with all of the streaming. We are more content to stay at home and binge watch something. The internet and social media had a similar effect. COVID made all of this worse because people felt more and more comfortable staying at home. *Third Places* closed during COVID, and they have not reopened. Urban planners take *Third Places* into account when they plan communities. That is why they include parks and plazas where people can gather.

When I described *Third Places*, did Church come to mind? This is a place where we can have *Third Places*. If you come to Mass right before it starts and leave right after, it is not a *Third Place* for you. It can be a great spiritual experience, but you do not get the benefits of a *Third Place*. That is why we have coffee and donuts, Saturday night snacks, pizza night and spaghetti dinners. That gives you the opportunity to create a *Third Place*. Working with one of the groups is another way. In many ways, Parish Pastoral Council, School Committee and all of those groups become *Third Places*. The people who work together to make the spaghetti dinners happen are *Third Places*. I went this past week and spoke to our MOPS group, which is a wonderful *Third Place* for our young mothers. The more *Third Places* we have here, the better our church environment becomes; and the more it spreads into the community outside of the Parish. So everyone is invited to our *Third Places*. Think of us as your “*Cheers*.”

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim