

HOMILY 1st SUN ADVENT YRC 2018

I have a good friend who is a nurse. Early in her career she was a labor and delivery room nurse, so she was helping to deliver babies. A few years ago, she got her PhD in medical anthropology and studied end of life issues. She told me that giving birth and death are very similar. That struck me as odd at first, but after she explained it to me, I got it. We are born into this world and in death; we are born to eternal life. I found a story recently by an unknown author about twin boys in the womb and I want to share it with you today.

“Weeks passed, as the twins developed. As their awareness grew, they laughed for joy: ”Isn’t it great that we were conceived? Isn’t it great to be alive?” Together, the twins explored their world. When they found their mother’s cord which gave them life, they sang for joy. “How great is our mother’s love, that she shared her own life with us.” As the weeks stretched into months, the twins noticed how much each was changing. “What does this mean?” asked the one. “It means that our stay in this world is drawing to an end,” said the other. “But I don’t want to go,” said the one. “I want to stay here always.” “We have no choice,” said the other. “But maybe there is life after birth!” “But how can there be?” responded the one. “We will shed our life cord, and how is life possible without it? Besides, we have seen evidence that others were here before us, and none of them have returned to tell us that there is life after birth. No, this is the end.” And so the one fell into deep despair, saying, “If conception ends in birth, what is the purpose of life in the womb? It’s meaningless! Maybe there is no mother after all!” “But there has to be,” protested the other. “How else did we get there? How do we remain alive?” “Have you ever seen our mother?” said the one. “Maybe she lives only in our minds. Maybe we made her up, because the idea made us feel good!” And so the last days in the womb were filled with deep questioning and fear. Finally the moment of birth arrived. When the twins had

passes from their world, they opened their eyes and cried for joy. For what they saw exceeded their fondest dreams.”

The Gospel reading today is about the end times, which seem odd at first glance for the first Sunday of Advent, the first day of the New Year. And the reading makes the end times or our own death seem kind of scary. And the number one fear that people report is fear of death, and I guess some fear is understandable. Since we are not sure exactly what the next world will be like it is a little scary. It is fear of the unknown. However, we are people of faith. What is ahead for us is not disaster but redemption.

There is a concept in theology called realized eschatology. As people of faith, we know what Jesus has redeemed us. We can find joy and comfort in this knowledge even though it has not been fully realized in us. If you look at the Gospel reading as realized eschatology it is really appropriate for the first Sunday of Advent. We know what happened on that first Christmas and we have a good idea what will happen this Christmas so we can prepare for Christmas and wait for it to arrive with great anticipation. If we view death as our birth into eternal life, we can prepare for and wait for it with great anticipation. What do we need to do spiritually during Advent that will make us better prepared for Christmas and our birth into eternal life? My guess is that is not the decorations or the presents under the tree. These things are very nice, but they are not the essential things we need to prepare for Christmas or for our own death. Developing a closer relationship with Jesus and living the life he calls us to live is what is important to prepare for Christmas and for our birth into eternal life. Spend some time praying about this today. Are you the one twin without faith or are you the other who has faith? What do you need to do spiritually to prepare for Christmas and for eternal life? We can prepare for them wait for both of them with great anticipation.