

New Year's Day 2021

Scriptures: Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21

Homily: Fr. Ken

As we slide into 2021, a false optimism awaits us. Many believe that things will return to normal. But things will not be the same, because we will not be the same. The meaning and even the definition of fundamental human life experiences will have changed. Such realities as friendship, neighbor, Church, school, entertainment, health, employment, and even spouse will have taken on a new meaning and new relevance for each of us because of how we newly experienced them and participated in them for upwards of nearly one very long year.

Today's Gospel pericope is a continuation of the infancy narrative. Again, we recall God's entrance into our history through the birth of Jesus Christ, the very hope for humanity.

The life of Jesus reveals to us the infinite unconditional love that God has for each and every one of us. It is that very love that gives us hope today.

As we now peer beyond the curtain of 2020, we step cautiously into the new year of our world. We have hope, but it is not blind.

On New Year's Eve, four years ago, December 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, the lead editorial in *The New York Times* characteristically read then: "Take a Bad Year. And Make It Better".

It is not only in the United States that we feel around us the paranoia, hysteria, and fatalism of a conflicted public. But across the world billions of people face challenges and struggles in their own lives, in their towns, and in their nations.

Reflective of people everywhere, and especially amidst the coronavirus pandemic today, we are now feeling what not having hope feels like.

Oddly, it seems, a variety of sources including religious communities, churches, synagogues, and others, as well as sources political, humanitarian, local and national have offered almost trinitarian-like resolves as a response:

-resist, reconnect, renew; mourn, resist, organize; hope, courage, resistance; rise, resist, reclaim; resist, heal, hope.

Pope Francis himself, while recognizing 2020 as a dismal year, counseled not only the value and virtue of nonviolence in his World Day of Peace message for the new year, but he counseled the gift that Jesus brings us, namely the gift of hope.

Our call for the new year is to make hope happen: to reach out and welcome, sustain, and support the families and friends of our sisters and brothers who are hospitalized by COVID-19, or who have died from it.

We are also called to make hope happen by welcoming immigrants and refugees into our communities, just as Jesus welcomed strangers; to support Churches that offer sanctuary and to resist any efforts to demonize the foreign-born.

We can make hope happen by seeking unity, reason, and compassion.

While the forces of disunity are strong, our job of bringing hope can make our nation less divided, as we defend those likely to suffer in the coming new year: the homeless, the unemployed, the underemployed, the disabled, and the sick.

In the middle of last century, there was a Methodist minister by the name of Blind Alfred Reed. He lived in the State of West Virginia where today recently post-election populist anger fed on racism and working class despair. The Reverend Blind Alfred wrote a remarkable song titled: "Always Lift Him Up". It's many verses counsel unflinching kindness for the most unloved and unlovable souls among us.

He wrote:

If he has no friends and everything's against him /  
If he's failed at everything that he has tried /  
Try to lift his load and help to bear his burden /  
Let him know that you are walking by his side.

If he feels that all is lost and he is falling /  
Try to place that poor man's feet on solid ground /  
Just remember that he's some mother's precious darling /  
Always lift him up and never knock him down.

That's a message for our times today. Lift up with hope those fighting for a living wage; those fighting against policing abuses and racial and economic discrimination; those who are marginalized and poor and weak.

Let us resolve to bring the re-discovered and renewed hope of Jesus Christ to all those in need, in this new year 2021.

Peace.