

Homily for the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 18-19, 2020

Readings: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3; John 1: 29-34

Preacher: Ruth Marchetti

This move into Ordinary Time feels anything but ordinary. We live in extraordinary times with each day bringing astonishing shifts in normal weather patterns, frightening news of fragile international relations being negotiated through confrontation and bullying and increasing levels of human suffering as millions of people flee violence and hopelessness only to find they have nowhere to go; no one will take them in. Where is our God in all of this? Where is this “light to the world,” this one who will remove the world’s sins, this one who brings justice? Hasn’t God heard our cry?

Christmas already seems long ago. Even the beauty and mystery of the child’s birth was so quickly overshadowed by the threat of military action and a flight into the safety of a foreign land. Now suddenly the child has grown into a man and the times are ordinary, no angels, no wise men, and no miraculous birth. Just prophets crying out—Isaiah, Paul, John—proclaiming God’s engagement with the world, now embodied in the person of Jesus. Today’s readings have the ring of hope, now, finally the people of the earth will turn towards God, towards goodness. Towards ordinary?

This past fall, I spent a week at Casa Alitas, a migrant shelter in Tucson, Arizona. Each day ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) would drop off families who had passed their initial screening for asylum. Having spent several days in custody in crowded, uncomfortable conditions without showers or adequate food, families were greeted warmly, given food, a health screening, clean clothes and a private room for sleeping. Children were entertained in play areas while parents made arrangements for the next leg of their journey to relatives somewhere in the United States. Many generous people in the city of Tucson had responded with open arms to this human crisis at their door, caring for the physical and emotional needs of these people in trauma. My time there was short, but one family especially sticks in my mind.

The tiny mother had traveled from Guatemala with her two small children, trying to join her husband who worked up north. As she struggled to sort through boxes of clothing, I reached out for her baby girl. The little one's beautiful face gaped with a cleft lip and palate. As Mama removed the little boy's winter jacket he whimpered—the incision from a recently-implanted pacemaker was still healing. As the other arm came out of the jacket, I saw that it ended at his elbow. I don't know their story, but I know that the conditions that compelled that mother to risk their lives to make the dangerous journey across Mexico with two fragile children were no less malevolent than those that forced the Holy Family to flee to Egypt. At Casa Alitas they were met with kindness, compassion, gentleness, and above all, love. What would they find at the end of their journey? Would they be allowed to stay in Egypt until it was safe to return? Would they ever get to have ordinary times?

Here in Rochester, I am heartened by the vast number of people who work selflessly to bring more justice to the world. They feed, clothe, and house people and work to change policies that lay greater burdens on those most in need. They stand up for fairness and dignity in our justice system, teach peace to children and adults, and organize for change in oppressive economic policies.

They creatively dream of sustainable cities, then work to make those dreams reality. They make their voices heard to legislators at their town, city, county, state and federal governments. They bring so much light to this world in these extraordinary times. They are people of faith and people of no faith, but they embody those virtues Jesus taught: justice for the oppressed, compassion, kindness, gentleness and love.

Sometimes it's hard to maintain hope when the world seems to be spiraling down in a cycle of cruelty and apathy, a time when Jesus' simple message of welcoming and inclusiveness has been spurned by many people of faith in favor of a fearful turn towards strongmen. But Isaiah, Paul, John and Jesus also met resistance and disbelief as well as cruelty and persecution. Are these times really so extraordinary? The gift of belief brings hope in the face of hopelessness. We are waiting, waiting for God to hear our cries and

“put a new song” into our mouths. We can only trust that God is present and hears our cries as we stay faithful to the work that God calls us to do, ever hopeful that ordinary times will come again.