

## Sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent, December 10, 2018

### Solemn Evensong

By the Reverend Dr. James Conlin Pace

*Year 2: Isaiah 5:1–7; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12; Numbers 24:12–17a*

What follows is a series of musings that have blessed me and I hope they will you. It all started, sadly, with one word that stood out in an email from our assistant dean for student affairs. That word is *home*. She told us that 88 out of some 1600 students call the state of California *home*. We opened up our offices to these students who may no longer have a home in their home state. I spent a good deal of time on my walk home on Thursday wondering what it would be like to leave one's home last September in California, excited about going all the way to NYC to study nursing at NYU, and then discovering during final exams, that there was no longer a home to go home to.

Tomorrow, I will discover if that is actually the case for any of our 88. Sadly, so many in California have lost their homes and everything in them. But so many are glad to be alive.

In my own home, it called me to contemplate all of the stuff that I've accumulated. Some of that stuff I moved from one place to another over the years. It

follows me. Or, I follow it. Have you ever played a game with yourself that goes something like this: if my home were to be destroyed for any reason, God forbid, and all humans and pets survived, and if I could only remove one or two possessions from that home, what would they be? My former spouse once told me that if that happened to her, and assuming all the dogs and cats got out safely, she would grab all the pictures on the walls of our three boys as they grew up over the decades.

At our Patronal feast just two nights ago, I greeted people as they moved toward the reception. More than once, a person took my hand tightly in theirs and said “It’s good to be home.” One person was from Pittsburgh; he told me that there is no church in Pittsburgh like this church. And even though he lives there, his membership is here. He calls St. Mary’s his spiritual home.

During that same Mass, I learned that St. Mary’s has called Times Square its home for some 147 years. And on December 8th, I always look forward to singing the Offertory hymn which I love. Many refer to it as our Patronal “Fight song” or our “Pep Rally” Song. Beyond its title, *Ye who own the faith of Jesus*, it’s also

referred to by man as the Hail Mary song. And the 6th verse is as follows: “May the Mother’s intercessions on our homes a blessing win. That the children all be prospered, strong and fair and pure within.” Homes are blessings. Homes serve to build people and their faith. Tonight’s second lesson tells us about a people who are persecuted in their homes. And they fear a God of retribution. But Paul tells them that no matter what the state of their home, their community, the persecutions they endure, God is always a God of love. Sometimes it truly doesn’t seem that way.

When time allows, ask me to tell you the story of a home in Atlanta. I was the interim priest at a parish outside of Atlanta and a young single mother had just purchased the home where she and her two dogs and her little daughter lived. After one month, she told me that she knew that a section of her home was filled with evil and she was living in fear. St. Clement’s took a large role in the blessing of that home making it a home of welcome once again.

Having a home is a luxury. I spoke to a homeless man who was also at the reception following last Friday’s mass. I asked him where would he go that night. He told me certainly not to a shelter. He told me that in a

shelter, one could get hurt. He said he walks the streets all night long, and then comes here to sleep once the church opens in the morning. He called St. Mary's his home.

I have two cavalier spaniels that call Apartment 5, here, home. I learn a lot of things and meet a lot of people as I walk them in and around Times Square every day. During those walks, I've come to know a nice elderly man on a cane who lives next door in the Broadway Hotel. He looks a bit disheveled, and more than once I've seen the ambulance take him to the hospital. He feeds the pigeons by dumping what seems tons of birdseed on the sidewalk. I often pause to wonder how he can afford to call a hotel home? Quentin reminds me that looks may deceive, that he may in fact, be the hotel's owner.

I've also discovered that two people call a little two-door compact car that is parked across the street, home. They are asleep within the car every morning as I walk by them, and I see them eating in there, folding their clothes, or, just sitting.

Our assistant bishop, Bishop Glasspool, sent out another of her wonderful "unofficial" e-letters last

Friday describing a new sculpture on the grounds of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. It is a bronze, life-size, park bench. And on the bench is a life-size sculpture of a homeless man, his entire body including his head covered by a blanket, only his feet are uncovered. And each foot has a nail print in it. The sculpture is titled *The Homeless Christ*. When I read about it, I instantly thought of the text, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.”<sup>1</sup>

In the most recent *Angelus*, the Rector titles the lead article: *Advent Lives. Or, Advent Lives. Which one? Or both?* It is a beautiful piece. One line caught my eye: “Almost of all of us have Christmas obligations of one sort or another this month. Enjoy them, but save your best heart and your home, as you are able, for Advent.”<sup>2</sup> Advent begs to live in our heart and our home.

We have at least one member of our congregation I know of who sells homes for a living. I’ve learned from her over the years that it’s hard work as there are

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:58.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stmvirgin.org/the-angelus-our-newsletter/2017/12/9/volume-20-number-2>.

many barriers to home ownership. Many stem from financial constraints, but some from people afraid of what others might bring to a building, or a neighborhood. It's everyone's dream to own a home; but sadly, too few who want to, actually do.

I also have reflected on the fact that when I have asked certain people where their home is located, some will reply that they live at so-and-so place or so-and-so address. Others never use the word live, rather, they say: I stay at so-and-so place.

In the vault to my left lies the mortal remains of many of our faithful, some dating back decades. Their ashes stay there but the faithful do not live there. Their true home rests in the heart of Jesus. Perhaps that place of many mansions is the one, true and only, definition of home.

And so. Where did these various musings finally take me? I was grateful for the time to just sit and think and wonder about them all. It gave me time to explore permutations of the meanings of "home." This was an exercise of living into Advent and making it alive by giving due thought to something truly important,

namely, preparing in our heart a home for the Son of Mary.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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