

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent 2009  
Fr. Bob VerEecke, S.J.

Ho, Ho, Ho....Merry Christmas. Why don't we skip Advent this year and get to the good stuff? That's what we see all around us wherever we go. At the mall, on the TV. The signs and symbols that are everywhere are of Christmas and not Advent. Except here hopefully. In this beautiful church. For the next four weeks you will be invited to stay focused on the preparation and the promise of this beautiful season. We will hear again of God's faithful love. And we will hear it "hopefully".... That is with hope that we will once again find the way to walk on the pathways that God sets out for us. Who knows we may even fall in love again with God and the things of God this advent season.

So instead of "Ho Ho Ho, Merry Christmas" how about "Whoa, Woe, Whoa. Awesome advent." (I know it sounds like "Do you know the way to San Jose.")  
But wait!

The first "Whoa" is a reining in. Yes, the Christmas horses are out of the barn but it's up to you to rein them in. To stop, to look and listen. Someone told me that the way to "rein in" a horse is to "sit down and back and quiet the hands." Isn't that a great lesson for Advent! Sit back, sit down, quiet your soul! Do you know the way to put the brakes on the frenzy of the season and slow down? Can you look around and see God's presence and hear God's voice, not in beautiful displays of Christmas but in spare, unadorned simplicity like the light of a lantern or the undecorated evergreen? Not in choruses of Hallelujah and Glory to God in the highest but in words that encourage trust: "On that day, a just shoot shall sprout. The lord will be our justice."

Look for the unadorned/ listen for the still, small voice within and without.  
Sit back and down and quiet your soul!

The second woe is a woe, w-o-e! The gospel of the first Sunday of Advent is always a reminder of the final Sundays of the liturgical year that have preceded it, images of the end of the world that are meant to evoke the feeling of everything collapsing, coming apart around you! Advent is meant to put us on edge! On the edge of something that emerges from the chaos,

the confusion, the collapse of the world as we know it. Advent is an edgy time. We are called to walk the path of justice and righteousness. Stand up, raise your heads, look for your liberation in God.

(At this point the Church is in darkness except for the light of the Advent wreath, the lanterns around the altar and the light from the outside that streams in through the stained glass windows.)

The third “Whoa” is the awesome one. It was my “whoa” when I came into the church yesterday afternoon to see the unadorned evergreens, the advent wreath, the lantern light and the single light of the Candle, This whoa is the one that is simply amazed, awe struck at what can be when we let God’s spirit live in us.

This Whoa is a “wow” spoken with a sense of the awesome reality that God loves us so much that God desires to walk with us, to embrace us and our world. It is this Whoa/wow that is at the heart of the message of the Advent season. O come Emmanuel. God is with us.