

Christmas 2011

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“It came upon a midnight clear, that glorious song of old from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold.” (Sung)

For years now I have chosen a Christmas carol to frame my homily for the Christmas liturgy. Last year it was “Good Christian Friends Rejoice,” before that “Angels we have heard on high” (The deacon’s name was Angel), “Silent night,” “O Holy night,” “I wonder as I wander,” “Dancing Day,” “All I want for Christmas.” (Only kidding) I could go on and on since I have been preaching for 23 years here at midnight at St. Ignatius.

This morning’s song... or is it night? Is it clear? Is it late or is it early? Is it clear? Is anything clear on this midnight? The skies? Clear? Visibility good? Is it clear at all what we are doing here in the middle of the night or is it early morning? My weariness says night, says yesterday, but is it really today or is it tomorrow? And is it clear what we are doing here? Does our gathering in faith to “hear that glorious song of old” make any difference in our weary world? (That’s in verse 2) “And still their heavenly music floats o’er all the weary world.”

There was one year, ten years ago, when there was no Christmas carol to sing. It was the first Christmas after 9/11 and it was more than challenging to find words of “comfort and joy.” There was no “merry making” and it was a challenge to sing, “Joy to the world.” I was tempted to use the same homily tonight I gave ten years ago, for our world has not really changed for the better. Terror, civil strife, war, famine, and sectarian violence still tear away at the fabric of our human community. The angels’ song of “peace on earth, good will to all” sounds hollow and mocking when we hear it in the context of the destruction that pervades our world.

Yes, I know I sound like the Grinch who stole Christmas. I'm really not. (The Grinch may be the Roman congregation that gave us the new translations) I would like to believe that our gathering in prayer, in song, in 2011 really does make a difference in our "weary world." This is what I said ten year ago, this is why it is a "Midnight clear":

We are here because we need to hear and relive the story of God's wondrous love. God's flesh and bones love in Jesus, God's vulnerability cradled in Mary's arms. We are here tonight because we trust in God's infinite mercy and abundant grace that may bring healing, light, forgiveness and peace to our un-peaceful world and troubled hearts. If there has ever been a time when our world needs to be wrapped in the swaddling clothes of God's peace and justice, it is now. If there ever was a time when we needed to be wrapped in the swaddling clothes of God's gentle healing love, it is now. If there ever was a time when we needed the light of Christ to shatter the darkness, it is now.

If I'm here 10 years from now, I imagine that I will say those same words about needing to be wrapped in the swaddling clothes of God's gentle healing love and peace and justice. But I'm not giving up hope. Dum spiro, spero. That was the theme for my homily for the second Sunday of advent. While I breathe, I hope. While I breathe, I hope and pray for a world where the angel's clarion call "Peace on Earth, Good will to all" will be a reality.

*For lo! The days are hastening on,
By prophet seen of old,
When with the ever-circling years
Shall come the time foretold
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,*

*And the whole world sends back the song
Which now the angels sing.*