

Advent 4

1. As you may remember, I had wanted to talk about prayer on each Saturday and Sunday Mass during Advent. As it turns out, this Mass, the 7:30, is the only Mass at which I have been able to do so. Either because of snow storms or a lack of heat or Fr. Bruce celebrating the Mass, I have not been able to do this at the other two Masses, the 4pm on Saturday and the 10 am on Sunday.

2. So, today let me just review some key points of these past three homilies on prayer as a way of concluding this topic. We began with the familiar definition of prayer as the raising of the mind and heart to God. We said that many people pray even though they don't belong to a church or synagogue or mosque or temple, and we explained that this is because prayer is natural to human beings. We referred to the German theologian Karl Rahner who taught that our ability to think, and therefore to be human, is possible only because God is present to us as background or backdrop which makes it possible for us to classify things and therefore think. In saying that Rahner was paraphrasing St. Paul who preached to the Athenians by quoting their own poets to them, poets who said of God that in him we humans live and move and have our being. Yes, prayer is natural to human beings.

3. We explained the current widespread phenomenon of people defining themselves as spiritual, not religious, that is, as people who believe in God and pray to him but do not want to be part of an organized religion. All organized religions, they say, are corrupt. And even if they were not, these people prefer to go it alone. They are spiritual, not religious. We explained that these people are off base for two reasons. The first is that as people we are social animals. We cannot go it alone. We need others, and we need organizations in all areas of our lives, especially religion. The second reason we gave is that the God of Judaism and Christianity is not simply a God of individuals. No, he came to create a people; he came to establish a kingdom. Therefore they are misinterpreting Jesus' teaching. They really should not claim to be Christians because to be a Christian a person must belong to a Christian community, a church.

Then last week we touched on reasons why so many people, so many Catholics, after many years of attending Mass have ceased to do. Is it boredom? There are many possible reasons, but I suggested that perhaps one reason for some people may be that they are actually looking for a religious community but often do not find it when they go to Mass. I suggested that maybe we

Catholics have not yet learned to pray together as a community. Maybe we are still doing our own, individual, thing at Mass rather than praying as a community.

I must be careful here because people's piety is very important to them. Yet I would be remiss if I did not remind you that Vatican II rediscovered the communal character of the Mass. Have we taken that home to ourselves here? Are we a community when we celebrate Mass? I think we do pretty well. We take our part. We say our lines. We greet each other. And many of you also take part in many activities of the parish's life, things like the pantry and the bazaar and the meals. Personally, I think we could sing a little louder. I also think we could sit closer together. Of course, it goes without saying that you should not leave the community action until it is over. But that is obvious, I think.

So, let us pray, let us pray communally, let us become the body of Christ here in this one little community called St. Charles Borromeo Church of Woonsocket, now in its 161st year.

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