

HOMILY ~ CHRISTMAS 2022

There was a man named Frank. He was developing dementia. His memory was failing, and he was becoming more and more confused. Early one morning in March, he came downstairs announcing that he had forgotten today was Christmas. He asked his wife to help him decorate and wrap gifts. His wife decided to just go with it. She called their three children, explained what was happening and got the whole family together to celebrate Christmas that day. It was actually a warm, enjoyable experience for all of them. After the children left, Frank asked his wife to tell him about his childhood Christmases because he could not remember them. His wife thought it was just as well that he could not remember his childhood because it was abusive, and they never celebrated Christmas. For the first time in her life, his wife lied to him. She told him about the wonderful Christmases full of love, traditions and memorable gifts; and this brought her husband great joy. Now, every few months, Frank announces that it is Christmas; and the whole family gathers to celebrate. His children think of these days as Father's Day because it makes their father so happy. They all think it is kind of refreshing to have Christmas come as a surprise.

Christmas is a surprise. That first Christmas 2,000 years ago certainly was. Mary and Joseph were certainly surprised. They had both received messages from an angel announcing how the birth of Jesus would come about and that Jesus would be the Messiah. They were still trying to figure that out. The shepherds were certainly surprised. I doubt that they expected to see a multitude of heavenly hosts with an angel saying, "*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests,*" and what exactly did that mean? Herod was certainly surprised and so afraid that he plotted to have all the children of a certain age killed. The people who had been waiting for a Messiah for so many years were surprised that he came into the world as a baby born to a poor family. They expected a powerful, wealthy leader who would come into the world and straighten everything out for them. Jesus, a poor man who was uneducated, was the Messiah? They were so surprised that most of them never accepted that Jesus was the Messiah. No one expected this extraordinary Messiah to come into the world through ordinary daily life.

So, are you open to a surprise this Christmas? The way things are going in the world right now, I am surprised that people can be kind to each other during the Christmas season; but if we can, we can also continue to be kind all year. Everyone in this Church today is going to be on a journey this year. We may think we know what the year will bring, but trust me. It will be full of surprises. We have to be open to the surprises. Some of them will be really good; but if we are not open to them, we will not see the goodness. Just like Frank's family. I am sure they were surprised

and celebrating Christmas was not what they expected to do that day. They could have argued with him, but that would not have cured his dementia; and they would have missed a really nice Christmas. Some of the surprises will be challenging and difficult. We can deny that they exist or try to change something that cannot be changed, or we can say *"I guess this is what was supposed to happen"* and go with it and let it unfold. If we take Jesus with us on the journey, he will help us to work everything out one step at a time. God works through everything, and sometimes the things that are challenging in our lives lead to the things we are most grateful for.

The biggest surprise we have had in recent years in the pandemic. Who was not surprised by that? We have had a couple of difficult years, but I think this is the year we are going to move out of the darkness and into the light. We are learning how to live with COVID, because it is not going away. We have dealt with the physical effects of COVID. Now we have to deal with the psychological and emotion affects. All of the isolation has been difficult. We have learned to be afraid of each other because we can make each other sick. All of the isolation has led to anxiety and depression. One of the best ways that we can deal with the anxiety and depression is by re-establishing our relationships. We need more than one or two close relationships in our lives. People have become way to content to stay at home alone. That is not healthy. God created us as social beings, and we need lots of relationships. At work, many of our social relationships and community are gone because we are working from home. Many of our social and community groups no longer meet the way they did before COVID.

However, we still have community at Church. One of the great things about being part of an organized religion is being part of a Church community, and I must say that St. Edith has a fabulous community. Our intent this year is to strengthen and broaden this community. We have re-opened all of the activities and groups we had going before COVID, and we are establishing new ones. Please take a copy of the bulletin and have a look at what is going on at St. Edith. You are bound to find something that you need or something that is appealing to you. Pick an activity and join in. We will welcome you. Everyone belongs here at St. Edith. Be open to the surprises this Christmas and this year will bring. Get out of your house. Join back in with life.

Love & Peace

Fr. Jim