

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

Last evening we had our first 9th grade Confirmation meeting via Zoom and it was not bad at all, in fact, the catechists, all mothers of kids in the group, had a great plan and the whole experience was really good.

The kids have all grown, voices have changed, height and weight have increased, shoulders have broadened, even, bits of fuzz above lips, but they are the same sweet, charming, kind, and fragile kids we last saw almost a year ago.

I told them that Confirmation has meant and can mean many different things in our Catholic experience but my primary motivation behind our Confirmation preparation is to have them know and appreciate the benevolence of the Church as our ancestors did so that as we grow and mature we know that we can call on the Tradition that is held in the Church when we need it.

I told them that I do not subscribe to the idea that Confirmation is when they become an “adult” in the Church nor is Confirmation a kind of graduation and final exam of all the stuff they previously learned because now they have the complete package and are on their own.

Freshman in high school are not adults, Catholic faith is not a package of facts and data, the only reason Confirmation is in junior high school in some places in this country is that it was used as a carrot to try and prop up Catholic parochial schools.

I want them to be able to turn toward a kindly Church as they grow and seek the kindness of the Church when they need something that they believe that the Church can provide such as a place for marriage or baptism or in their grief to bury a loved one.

I think we have taught them through a myriad of experiences that the Church, the building and the people there, are places where the Sacred Mystery can be found and celebrated.

In my own mind, I fear that will not be the case as parishes are not always kind or consoling or happy to welcome but I can only do what I can do.

Being a disciple of Christ is a way of being in the world not a book of questions and answers. Catholic Tradition can inform difficult situations with faith, hope, and love but not as dry abstract ideas but in the words and deeds of those who identify as Catholic Christians not as something that sets them apart or above but manifests itself in consoling words, comforting acts, and sincere empathies.

It was wonderful to see these lovely children in the domestic, almost intimate, settings of their homes, their bedrooms. Many had strings of those tiny lights in their rooms, signs of reassurance, even, hope in a very strange world that we find ourselves in, I would suggest.

I could not help but think of the Old Testament book, The Song of Songs, a unique text in the Bible which I believe forms the foundation of the Gospel of John, a story of lovers in the intimacy of their mother's bedrooms where they encountered "God" in the closeness of their inner rooms not in the Temple or Church but in their inner spaces of sacred presence.

The apparent "best memories" from their CFP experiences were painting the rocks in the garden and putting their handprints on that banner near the chapel door, "With These Hands!" at past VBS and the Christmas caroling/jars of beauty exchanges at Hartsfield when they were in 7th grade and serving at the FishFrys.

As we go forth this Advent I hope you find closeness even in absence, intimacy in our need to survive, and kindness, and the comforts of your memories and the inner spaces of your hearts and homes.