

Homily for
The Second Sunday of Advent
Sunday December 7th, 2008

“Pay it Forward—but Do it Today”

If you think you and I are busy, then you ought to try being the UPS guy for a day. Seriously. People who work for delivery companies and the United States Postal Service live a very hectic pace every year at this time, to say the least. Not to mention that when you're riding around in one of those big brown trucks you really experience the weather up close and personal. I was in Office Depot the other night standing at the counter of their printing department. Behind the counter was their regular UPS guy, unloading all kinds of boxes. I looked at him and said, "hey man." He responded very enthusiastically with, "hey sir, how are you doin' today?" I said, "really good. And you? I bet you guys really feel the cold out there in your truck, don't you." (It had already dropped to something like 30 degrees.) His eyes widened, he started to laugh a little, and said, "oh yeh, that's true—the coldest place in the winter and the hottest in the summer." At this point in our conversation, while he is continuing to unpack his boxes, he also continues to talk to me. "Oh yeh," he said, "really cold out there sometimes and sometimes really hot. But you just gotta take it step by step. You gotta get up everyday and just have the right attitude, that's all. That's all you have to do." Now, I kid you not—those were his exact words. It was as if he was giving me a little sermon on life. He continued talking, unpacked his last box, let the clerk sign for it, and then looked at me and said (on the fly—in other words, on the way out the store), "now you have a good day and a good holiday, you hear?" I told him, "you do the same." (**Pause**) Now, here's the interesting thing about that conversation—other than the fact that I took it as a real blessing—I really didn't say anything. All I really said was, "hey, kinda cold out there, I bet." Then, the next thing you know, I'm receiving the gift, the blessing of this conversation, this mini-expression of a "life philosophy" from a guy whom I had never met before and may never meet again. It was such a blessing to me, that, well, I'm preaching on it today.

(Pause)

Most of us are probably familiar with the concept, "pay it forward." Well, that was very much a "pay it forward" conversation. It seems that pretty much everywhere I've gone lately, this has been my experience: the grocery store, other

big stores, local places of business, buying my Christmas tree last week, and, most recently, the other night. Positive, kind comments have been met with the same. Often it's happened in places where you might expect the opposite: people who have been working standing on their feet for hours at an incredibly busy place of business, for example. For me, it serves as a reminder that "*paying it forward*" is, in large part, what we are here to do. The added reminder, however, that comes to us during this Advent time is the need to "*pay it forward—but **do it now.***" Not tomorrow. Today.

(Pause)

Every year when we come to the Season of Advent, there is a certain tone to the scriptures. This tone, this feeling is very focused and specific: time is of the essence. There is an urgency about life that we often risk forgetting. The scriptures during Advent urge us to stop putting off what we ought to be doing. This weekend, the message is the same. We hear John the Baptist urging us to "*prepare the way, to make our hearts ready for Christ.*" But it's in the first reading that we get a little bit of a distinction about paying it forward, when we hear Isaiah proclaim, "*fear not to cry out!*" Cry out what? "*Fear not to cry out, **here comes your God, and he comes with compassion!***"

(Pause)

What are you and I "*crying out*" everyday? In our dealings with one another, what are we "*paying forward?*" Are you paying forward your anger? Are you paying forward your jealousies? Your past—in some cases, *very past*—hurts? Are you paying forward your arrogance? Laziness? An attitude that says, "*I don't care*"?, or "*I'm the only one who matters.*"?

I don't know about you, but in looking back on my week, I take these words of scripture as a challenge *to not be afraid or reluctant* to say something to others that will hopefully lift their spirits, especially the stranger. I take this as a reminder to "*spontaneously pay forward the hope that is Jesus Christ.*"

A friend of mine once told me, shortly before he died, that, "*the best parts of life are the parts that are unscripted.*"

Random acts—random statements of kindness and hope. They're not always scripted. In fact, in most cases they're not.

“Paying forward words and actions that bring hope” is one of the specific challenges that comes to us this weekend in scripture. The added challenge is that we stop putting it off and that, if we’re not already doing it, we start today. In the words of Saint Peter, *“you know not the day nor the hour, so **be ready.**”* We hear this often during Advent. It’s not meant to scare us, just remind us, that life is precious and our time here brief.

Consider this as an *“**Advent practice**”*: every evening, television reminds us how many shopping days are left before Christmas. Suppose I take these advertisements as a call ***to pray*** rather than ***to purchase***. Suppose I put myself in the mind-set of Mary and Joseph, focused on the expected baby, wondering what he will be like and how he will affect my life. And suppose I consider how my approach to other people affects their life at any given moment.

(Pause)

“The best parts of life are the parts that are unscripted.”

(Pause)

Random acts of kindness and hope. They’re not always scripted. In fact, in most cases they’re not.

(Pause)

Be *“**hopefully spontaneous—pay it forward—do it today.**”*