



God's Servant First: Our King of Peace

BY AARON WELDON

As my family sang the line from O Come, O Come Emmanuel, “Bid Thou our sad divisions cease, and be Thyself our King of Peace,” it occurred to me that Advent is a particularly good time to think about how we foment “sad divisions” in the body of Christ, and what it might mean for us to take our role in those divisions seriously.

Catholics who try and bring their faith to bear on social questions—whether we focus on religious liberty, care for creation, or justice for immigrants—often get caught up in the polarizing habits of current American political culture. Polarization can infect the Church, rendering us unable to engage in mission. The Church isn’t much of a field hospital when her members are actively picking at the wounds in our society.

To be clear, polarization is more than deep disagreement. You and I can disagree with one another in good faith, and our disagreement can even generate fruitful discussion that benefits everyone. But if I know that you belong to “the other side,” and I decide to hold to a cluster of positions in opposition to yours simply because you are on the other side,

then our relationship is polarized. To be clear, polarization is more than deep disagreement. You and I can disagree with one another in good faith, and our disagreement can even generate fruitful discussion that benefits everyone. But if I know that you belong to “the other side,” and I decide to hold to a cluster of positions in opposition to yours simply because you are on the other side, then our relationship is polarized.

What can we do?

We can ask for the grace to be humble. The Solemnity of the Nativity reveals the humility of God. In the Incarnation, the all-powerful, unchanging God enters fully into our human situation. In a sense, God lowers Himself to reach us. However, in our need to elevate ourselves, we often cling to tribal identities and nurse resentments, and in the process, we close ourselves off from being able to simply listen to others. As we make our pilgrimage to Christmas, perhaps we can have the humility to listen to and make the effort to understand those we see as the other side.

We can commit to truth over tribe. At Christmas, we celebrate that God makes His Word flesh. In

Jesus Christ, God communicates the truth of Himself to us. Our commitment to Christ implies a commitment to truth, wherever it might be found. We cannot be committed to truth and polarized at the same time. It’s one thing to disagree with others, but it’s another thing to take a side on an issue before even considering what the truth of the matter is. And that’s what polarization is all about.

Advent is a perfect time to avail ourselves of the sacrament of reconciliation. We can honestly examine how we contribute in negative ways to our politics—by harboring resentments, nursing bad attitudes, refusing to listen to our opponents, and filling social media with comments whose only purpose is build up our side, rather than to move closer to truth.

During this season, we wait for the birth of our King of Peace. Perhaps we will see him more readily if we can humble ourselves, turn our eyes away from tribal agendas, and re-commit to being open to the light of truth.

