

“Home”

December 2, 2018: The First Sunday of Advent

[Psalm 25:1-9](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#); [Luke 21:25-36](#)

As Advent begins today, it's as if we all find ourselves in the last few weeks of a pregnancy--a pregnancy with whom, exactly? With God? But how can God be born in us? Who or what is growing among us? Who is coming to be?

I will not always be speaking about pregnancy and birth--but when I do, it might be that we are in or near the season of Advent. And since my husband Andy, also a priest, is filling in this morning for another local priest whose wife had a baby yesterday, early, and as we just celebrated the birthday of our older son a few days ago (who in that year that he was born, happened to be born on the First Sunday of Advent) it seems like, well, 'tis the season.

A little over seven years ago, late in pregnancy with our first child, Andy and I began to think more concretely about how to name this one who was coming to be. We had chosen not to learn the gender, as simply one way to practice allowing ourselves to be even more surprised by who God was giving us. Who was this one who was about to be born into our lives? How would we welcome him or her? Who would she or he come to be? What would be important to her or him? What would he love to do, how would she shine, what would make his face light up? What would be hard for her, how would he struggle? Who was this one who was coming to be?

As I (if I dare use these words) “pondered all these things in my heart” (you may recognize that Mary did that about Jesus!) I remembered a time when God showed me what it is to be at home, just as I am.

Growing up, I went to church at least once each Sunday: with my mom at the Catholic parish in our neighborhood and also with my dad wherever he might be singing that day. Whether Dad was singing at a Presbyterian church, as he did for a long time, or a Congregational church, or wherever he had a concert that weekend, I was in church at least once a Sunday.

When I was in middle school and high school, it began to strike me that unlike our Rite 13 and Journey to Adulthood (or J2A) programs here, the Sunday School at the parish where I was growing up had prepared me less to ask and dwell in questions of faith and of myself, and more to rehearse and clench answers. I'm sure we're all familiar with that type of pattern in our own lives of faith. It was such that when I got to college and found myself immersed in questions of so many different kinds--among them, questions about God, that my friends of many different backgrounds were asking me--I didn't know what to do, and I didn't know what to say. That's not a bad thing, but I was so at a loss for words that all I could do, when I got home for a break in college, was inform my mom that I just no longer would be going to church.

My mom's face changed. She steeled herself in her deep Catholic devotion, she did not accept my collegiate boldness, and she said that I *would* actually be going to church--and not only that, but that I would sit down and speak with the priest one on one. The priest was the very last person in the world with whom I wanted to talk, because he, in my mind, epitomized all of the unanswerable questions, among them the striking hypocrisies, in which I was immersed. For example, if the words about God that we rehearse on Sundays are about God's love for justice and mercy, God's steadfastness in our lives, God's care for all people, especially the vulnerable, then why in the world that we experience is there so much suffering and pain, especially for those among us who are most vulnerable (that is to say, each one of us)? Where was the

justice that God loves? Furthermore, in this talk of God's love for justice, there seemed to be so much talk of God's judgment, such that it was very hard to imagine how any one of us could be considered good or enough before God. So why, then, would I want to talk about God with a priest of all people?

But I went in, and it was one of those times when--you know the saying, "You might not remember what somebody said but you remember how they make you feel"--I don't remember what this priest said. I do remember that he listened. He didn't stop me in my delivery of grievances and struggles and yes, questions, in the faith. He listened: he did not try to argue with me; he did not try to rationalize; he did not try to persuade me; he did not tell me that I was wrong. He may well have sent me away to say a certain number of Hail Marys and Our Father--but I do remember how he made me feel, and it was a new feeling for me in that context. He made me feel that in the sight of God, I was enough, and I was good--good enough for God, in the midst of my many misgivings and struggles and wrestling and questions. I was good, and I was enough, and therein I was at home.

So, Owen is named after St. Owen Parish in Bloomfield Hills, where I first had that sense that I was at home in God and in myself. Andy's and my wish for this one who was coming to be is that he may know--whoever he is, wherever he goes, whatever he does, whatever he asks--that he may always have a home in himself and in God and, God willing, among us, his parents and family of faith.

Who is this one who is coming among us? Who are you coming to be?