

“... Looking Forward...”

My favorite definition of faith is the 1st verse of the 11th chapter of the letter to Hebrews, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” Faith grows out of hope. Faith is conviction, belief in what we cannot see. This definition applies to the two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, who we meet every winter a month or so after our celebrations of the birth of Christ.

St. Luke tells us that on the 40th day after Jesus was born his parents brought him to the temple to fulfill the ancient Jewish tradition by dedicating their first-born child to the Lord. Simeon was “looking forward” to the “consolation” of Israel. He hoped to see a sign of God’s salvation breaking into the oppression Israel had long lived under.

Luke, the one Gospel writer who is most concerned with telling us about the work and activity of the Holy Spirit; as he already has with the narratives of John’s birth and Jesus’ birth; now tells us this same Holy Spirit rests on Simeon: the Spirit reveals to Simeon that before he dies Simeon will see the Messiah, the Christ. And finally, it is the Spirit that guides, inspires Simeon to come into the Temple, just as the 40-day old baby Jesus is being presented.

So the promise is fulfilled. All that Simeon had been looking forward to is right there. He takes the baby and holds him up and declares, “now I can die... I’ve seen the salvation ... the consolation of Israel... the Messiah... a light for all...”

Yet with all this good news, there is also the reality of Christ’s coming – Mary will experience suffering, many in Israel will believe, many will reject Jesus. Anna compliments Simeon’s message of hope. She, too, was looking forward to God’s grace and love. Widows were dependent upon the generosity of others. But Anna, like Simeon, never lost hope. She continued to look forward to God’s grace, God’s glory. In fact, every day she went to the temple to pray. Prayer and worship is looking forward to God acting in our world.

I could not be a Christian without this gift of faith and hope and love. “Looking forward” is what sustains us, especially when challenged by the powers of evil, suffering and death. In the last 8 days, we’ve celebrated Requiems for two men who died because of cancer. They were too young -- 59 and 61. The shutdown has ended and people will go back to work, but it really doesn’t seem like our Congress and President have settled anything.

Ask yourself, “What am I looking forward to...” Where is my hope? How do I sustain my faith? This Church was overflowing, standing room only for those last two Requiems because of faith and hope and, mostly, love. Tod Reese and Brian Cowan were known for their love.

My answer to the question “What am I looking forward to?” is more love. Love from the God of love who inspires us to love; who teaches us that love is our consolation, our redemption, our salvation. More love in times of pain and suffering. More love in times of celebration and joy. See the light. Know the love.