



Gate of Heaven -- Our Lady of Victory

2018 — A Year Celebrating the Eucharist

### First Sunday of Advent Reflection

Today begins the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Scranton. Bishop Bambera has asked us to join our hearts in union with the entire diocese for the opening Mass of the anniversary year that will take place at St Peter's Cathedral in Scranton today.

Parishes are encouraged throughout this year to “add at the local parish level the features of the commemoration which are particular to the local faith community.” The Evangelization Committee of our two parishes has responded to this call by putting together a year of Eucharistic practices and reflections announced in last week's bulletin inspired by Bishop Bambera's statement that “This year is about Jesus - and the legacy that he left to the world following his death and resurrection. It is about his pledge to give life, meaning the purpose to his followers through faith in his word and in the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist. This year is about Jesus' challenge to his Church, his people, to proclaim his Gospel boldly in word and deed. This celebration reminds us of who we are as Church and of what we are called to do and to be.”

Our focus this year will be on Jesus Christ in the Eucharist as specifically mentioned by Bishop Bambera. The first three Sunday's in Advent will give us an opportunity to have a few minutes of reflection before Mass on a Eucharistic theme related to Advent spirituality.

Our first Advent reflection will begin by looking at examples of God's presence among his people in the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the presence of God among his people Israel was a very powerful and awesome presence. For example, when Moses led Israel out of slavery in Egypt, and they traveled through the desert for forty years, God's presence was visible in the pillar of fire to illumine them by night and the pillar of cloud that guided them by day. With them, they carried the Ark of the Covenant that contained articles of the Covenant between God and his people. The Ark of the Covenant was so holy that it was veiled in animal skins and blue cloth so that not even the priest could look upon it. When the Israelites would set up camp, they would place the Ark of the Covenant in the sacred tent called the Tabernacle, which was where the cloud of presence would hover over.

Many years later, when Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem, the loud of God's presence continued to hover over the Ark of the Covenant that was now kept in the veiled inner sanctuary of the Jewish Temple called the Holy of Holies. The presence of God was so powerful, that only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Feast of Yom Kippur after following many prescriptions.

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Keeping this awesomeness of God's presence in mind, it is amazing that this glorious, all-powerful God chose to come to us as a baby over 2000 years ago to establish a New Covenant with his people. This Emmanuel (which means God with us) is the God-man who came to save us from slavery to sin - both original and personal sins. He IS the New Covenant and he paid the price for our sins in order for us to have New Life in Him - reunited with the Father - and alive in the Holy Spirit.

There is an interesting comparison made by theologians between the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant over which the presence of God hovered AND Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant who was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit while the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son, took from her our flesh and made his dwelling place within her womb. This comparison looks at the three items contained in the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament: 1) the tablets of the 10 Commandments of the Covenant between God and his people; 2) the rod of Aaron representing the priesthood; and 3) a container of the manna or bread from heaven that fed the Israelites when they were wandering through the desert. These three items in the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament were fulfilled in Jesus Christ - 1) who IS the New Law of the New Covenant; 2) who IS the high priest; and 3) who IS the True Bread from Heaven. Thus Mary, carrying Jesus in her womb, is considered the Ark of the New Covenant. It can be said that Mary was the living tabernacle of God's presence among his people in a very unique and special way.

Because of this New Covenant and new life in Christ, we too, are living tabernacles of God's presence in the world. We are living tabernacles when we are in the state of grace and the Holy Trinity dwells within us by grace. Mary can teach us much about this, because she is the human being who is FULL of grace. We are living tabernacles in a special way when we receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion. When the priest holds up the Communion Host and says, "The Body of Christ," and we say "Amen" just like Mary said her "Yes" to the Angel who announced the Incarnation of Christ and waited for her consent.

In this first week of Advent, we look to Mary to teach us how to be living Tabernacles of the Lord who comes to us today in an intimate union made possible by his own Passion, Death, and Resurrection. This presence of God may be more intimate but nonetheless as powerful as the cloud of presence in the Old Testament. Not in an external pillar of fire or cloud, but deep within our soul God dwells within us - in the life of grace. He comes to us in special ways under the veil of the sacraments - most especially in His Body each Mass and, is kept in our Church under the Tabernacle as was foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacred tent called the Tabernacle. This is the REAL PRESENCE of our God camped among His people as we journey through this world...until his final coming in glory when all shall behold him face to face as He is.