

Advent 4A – December 2022

The forgotten Saint:

A pastor tells the story of a worried mother who phoned the Church office on the afternoon before the annual Christmas program to say that her small son, who was to play the role of Joseph in the Christmas Pageant, had a cold and had gone to bed on doctor's orders. "It's too late now to get another Joseph," the director of the play said. "We'll just have to write him out of the script." — And they did! Joseph just disappeared! And only a few of those who watched that night actually realized that Joseph was missing. Joseph is often forgotten. But today's Gospel is centered on Joseph. (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>)

"Dog Theology" vs. "Cat Theology":

"You may have heard of "Dog Theology" vs. "Cat Theology." Here is Dog's Theology: "You feed me. You pet me. You shelter me. You love me. You must be God!" Cat's Theology: "You feed me. You pet me. You shelter me. You love me. I must be God."

A *Far Side* cartoon once depicted a scientist announcing a breakthrough in understanding cat language: "They say only two things: 'Where's my dinner?' and 'Everything here is mine.'" Here is a cat story illustrating the need of our co-operation to get saved by God. At the very same time the Santa Ana winds returned to southern California, swamping flood waters inundated western state of Washington and submerged Interstate 5 for five days. Camera crews captured a lot of dramatic rescue stories. While filming the flooded farmlands a TV camera crew spied a lone refugee—a large grey cat perched on top of an old metal out-building. The flood waters had completely surrounded this cold and shivering cat. For whatever reason, the TV crew paddled and waddled forward to rescue the kitty. The cat took one look at this splashing gang of strangers with blazing lights and blaring bullhorns and saw his doom. As they tried in vain to corral and catch the cat, one camera recorded the kitty's "escape" to higher ground. First, the cat leapt an amazing distance to the next ragged metal building. Then, still in a panic, the cat proceeded to climb the sheer, smooth, aluminum siding straight up for at least twelve feet—until he reached the roof peak and was "safely" away from all those who had thought they would "rescue" him. Now in total darkness and utterly defeated, the camera crew left. A check of the same site the next day found the flood waters had receded, and the super-cat had disappeared.

2000 years ago, on that first Christmas, God launched a rescue mission to save mankind from the bondage of sin by sending His Son Jesus as our Savior. But being "saved" depends upon our trusting God the Savior because we cannot save ourselves. And that is the theme of today's Gospel. (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>)

Problems and Obedience

Sooner or later, every one of us comes up against the rough side of life, and we have to face big problems. Dr. J. A. Hadfield, noted British psychologist, commented on this when he said, "When people run up against life and find it too much for them, one gives up, one gets a headache, one gets drunk, and one prays" (J. A. Hadfield, *Psychology and Morals* [Robert Hadfield Co., 1935], p. 55).

When life gets hard, what do you do? Do you give up? Do you lash out in hostility? Do you try to find someone to blame? Do you give in to bitterness? Do you run away? Do you hide behind some illness? Do you drug yourself? **Or, do you pray?** Do you consider the problem prayerfully and then listen for God? That's what Joseph did, and it worked.

What a great lesson to learn from Joseph: the art of listening! Maybe this is why Jesus went often into the wilderness alone to do some praying and listening. Perhaps he learned from father Joseph how to listen for God's will. Joseph was big enough to listen. What a wonderful quality!

"God is with us."

Phyllis Martin, a schoolteacher in Columbus, Ohio, tells of the day when the storm clouds and strong gusts of wind came up suddenly over the Alpine Elementary School. The school public address system blared tornado warnings. It was too dangerous to send the children home. Instead, they were taken to the basement where the children lined the walls and huddled together in fear. She said the teachers were worried, too. To help ease the tension, the principal suggested a sing-along. But the voices were weak and unenthusiastic. One child after another began to cry. The children could not be consoled and were close to panic.

Then one of the teachers, whose faith seemed equal to any emergency, whispered to the child closest to her, "Kathy, I know you are scared. I am too, but aren't we forgetting something? There is a power greater than any storm. God will protect us. Just say to yourself, 'God is with us,' then pass the words on to the child next to you and tell her to pass it on." Suddenly that dark and cold basement became a sacred place as each child in turn whispered around the room those powerful words, "God is with us," "God is with us," "God is with us." A sense of peace and courage and confidence settled over the group. Phyllis Martin said, "I could hear the wind outside still blowing with such strength that it literally shook the building, but it did not seem to matter now... Inside the fears subsided and tears faded away... When the all-clear signal came sometime later, students and staff returned to the classrooms without the usual jostling and talking.

Through the years I have remembered those calming words. When we are frightened, we can claim that great Christmas promise: "God is with us"

(<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>).