

The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

1757 Conway Street • St. Paul, Minnesota 55106 • phone 651.774.1585 • e-mail church@stpascals.org

November 29, 2015

The First Sunday of Advent

Here's how I know I'm getting old. I spent Thanksgiving Day with many members of my family, including my oldest nephew, who is smart as a whip, funny, thoughtful and sociable. He is 24 years old, lives in Washington D.C., and holds down a very responsible job at one of the largest financial corporations in the country. At some point during our conversation the subject turned to politics, and during that exchange I was comparing one of the presidential candidates to Archie Bunker. At which point my nephew asked, "Who's that?" "You've never heard of Archie Bunker?" I asked. "No," he replied. I whipped out my smart phone and pulled up a photograph of Carroll O'Connor from the internet, and I put it to his face. "You've never seen that guy?" I asked. No, there was no recognition at all. Well, how do you describe Archie in a few sentences to somebody, without any context?

I finally told my nephew that Archie is a guy whose first reaction to every social, cultural, sexual, or religious movement that he doesn't understand is fear. And the fear expresses itself in outrageous bigotry, intolerance, shouting, denial and dismissiveness. But it's always dressed up as bravado and patriotism, and courage and moral heroism. In the mind of Archie Bunker, the last man in the world who remains loyal to God, Truth, Decency, and Strength of Will is Archie Bunker and those fewer and fewer people that he can find to agree with him. But the truth of the matter is that Archie is one of the most insecure, bewildered and angry guys that you'll ever meet, even though he's not a fundamentally bad man. He's just overwhelmed by a world that's changing too fast and is stripping away all of his old narratives about how things have always been and are always supposed to be, and so his only defense is to ridicule the people who have come to different conclusions. Which is why the people with whom he shares his house are not "Edith," "Gloria," and "Michael." They are "Dingbat," "Little Girl," and of course, "Meathead."

People laughed at Archie when they first met him on TV, but they were also made uncomfortable by him. He was a character, but he was also disturbingly familiar. The preposterous things that he'd say out loud were some of the same things that people whom we know actually believed. Sometimes they were things that **we** had sort of thought about but didn't have the courage to speak about openly. So if Archie was ultimately a buffoon and pathetic, maybe we were too. And if Archie's main motivation was fear, maybe ours was too. And if Archie tried to clothe his fear in a costume of false swagger and confidence, maybe we do that too. Our politicians certainly do that, but I guess they *have* to in order to keep their jobs. After all, who really wants to hear from the candidate who says, "ISIS frightens me, and I don't know how to make them stop," or "I'm not sure how to think about people who are really different from me," or "If other religions might also be true, then why am I clinging to mine?" or "Our most secure and prosperous generation may already have passed us by." Who wants to hear **that**? I don't but what if at least some of it is true?

There are at least two very distinct ways to respond to all that discomfort. One is the Archie Bunker way, by thumping our chests and raising our voices, and closing our borders, and dehumanizing strangers, and ratcheting up the bombing and killing, and pretending that's bravery. Another is the Advent way, which begins by honestly acknowledging our weakness, our inability to solve every problem on appeal to our own strength or armed force and cleverness alone. It involves a lot of prayer and vulnerability before the presence of the **real** God—not the **phony** God who we tell ourselves always agrees with our opinions anyway...there is no true God like that. And it

The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

1757 Conway Street • St. Paul, Minnesota 55106 • phone 651.774.1585 • e-mail church@stpascals.org

includes honest confrontation with Sacred Scripture like Luke's gospel today, the one that speaks about the collapse of every false security, every delusion about *us* being in control of the future, every attempt at delaying or denying the Day of the Lord and the establishment of *His* eternal kingdom rather than ours.

That's not frightening news. That's *great* news—the best of *all*, in fact, *provided* we are ready to let go of every false and merely human effort to establish a smaller, more self-centered Kingdom on Earth, one that is there to protect only *me* and the people *I* love. There's no such lasting kingdom like that, and we can either accept that with trust, or we could go Archie Bunker's way.

The Day of the Lord *is* coming. That's the Advent fact and the Advent promise. And that is a gospel announcement that is not intended to scare us, but to awaken us and reorient us. It's coming for *all* of us—both for those who are ready for it with quiet confidence, and those for whom it will cause terrifying fear and utter disillusionment. Frankly, I'd prefer the first way, and so would St. Luke and so would our Lord. "Be vigilant at all times," He tells us, "And pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are soon to come." Those tribulations are not vindictive punishments from an angry God. They are simply the evaporating false hopes of those who put their final trust in something other than Christ, something other than universal, unqualified love. Who would want to do *that*, other than Archie...and the Archie that is at least a little part of all of us?

As we rose from our Thanksgiving feast on Thursday I told my nephew that I was going to get a homily out of his ignorance. He said, "I'm sure you will."