

II ADVENT 2015/SAINT NICHOLAS DAY
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
THE COLLECT ROMANS 15.4

✠

Everything in Holy Scripture has been written for our learning...the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent tells us...so that we may embrace...willingly and enthusiastically in our hearts...the hope for everlasting life.

We hear the words of Holy Scripture read at Mass. We read with our own eyes the same words. We mark those words...like an indelible pencil underscores an important sentence in a book. We learn...we study and understand what the words mean for us. We digest...we get spiritually nourished by what we have read...and we make our hope active...we take action.

We also learn from the life and work of one of the Saints of God whose name does not appear anywhere in Holy Scripture. He is called Kris Kringle, Father Christmas, Sinterklaas, Saint Nicholas. He is the real Santa Claus and he was a man of deep compassion and action. Today 6 December is the Feast of Saint Nicholas. What a wonderful opportunity to talk about and learn from the man who took his faith seriously...and took action.

Nicholas was born on 15 March 270 in the Mediterranean port city of Patara in present-day Turkey. He was the only son of wealthy Christian parents who lived in nearby Myra. His parents died when he was still very young. His uncle, who was also named Nicholas, was the Bishop of Patara and raised young Nicholas. His uncle later ordained Nicholas to the priesthood.

Nicholas traveled to the Holy Land and lived a monastic life in a cave overlooking Bethlehem. One day while he was praying, he felt the Holy Spirit was leading him to return to Myra. In 317, he was consecrated the Bishop of Myra. Nicholas was one of the bishops who signed the Nicene Creed at the Council of Nicaea in 325.

Nicholas believed he had a fundamental duty as the Bishop of Myra to help those who had little money. He had a reputation for secret gift-giving...leaving coins in shoes people left at their front door. He did not fly through the air in a sleigh led by Rudolph and the other

reindeer. Unlike the large jolly character in the red suit, Nicholas stood barely five feet tall. He wore a disguise when he and his trusted assistants went from house to house leaving presents. He was the real Santa Claus who went about doing his work quietly and unseen.

One day Nicholas heard of a poor man who could not afford dowries for his three young daughters. Without dowries, his daughters could not get married. Employment opportunities for young women in the 4th century were non-existent. This meant the man's daughters would be forced into lives of prostitution. Nicholas visited their house one night and threw three bags of gold coins into an open window.

If we are looking for words to describe Saint Nicholas let's consider these and what we might learn from them...Love...Compassion...Action...Hope! He loved children and is their special patron. He had deep compassion for people...especially the poor. He took action when he learned of someone in need. He provided them with hope. We must work to cultivate the same qualities in our own lives.

When we hear and read about the lives of the Saints of God like Nicholas we should consider how they responded to the Gospel message of hope. We can see in the life and work of Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, the real Santa Claus, how he took the Scriptural imperative to live a life of hope, hope we get from hearing, reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting Holy Scripture, and to make that hope an action in our lives by sharing it with others.

It's comforting to know the large jolly man in the red suit is not just a character in a children's story about how Christmas presents get delivered or merely a figure on a Hallmark greeting card. He is, after all, Sinterklaas...Saint Nicholas...the real Santa Claus.

We can learn from him what it means to have and share hope...as we get ready for the greatest gift God is about to send our way...our true hope...Jesus who is our Emmanuel...God with us!

✠