

There is a coldness we can feel. But not a coldness that comes from the weather. I am talking about an emotional coldness; a cold that can penetrate the heart.

Not the physical heart, but that invisible place. This emotional cold makes us long for warmth. A heart can only take cold so long.

One of the easiest ways to light an emotional fire to warm the heart is to feel angry. Anger is a fire. And one of the quickest ways to light this fire is to have enemies to be angry at. De-personalize someone and then decide they are dangerous and you have an enemy.

I saw a one frame comic strip recently. An important looking man is walking into the office of a military leader. The military leader doesn't look up. The other says to him, "There's a middle eastern dissident facing persecution in his homeland to see you."

What the military leader doesn't see, but we do, is that beyond the open door in the waiting room is sitting a man. Well, not just any man. His appearance gives his identity away. The Middle Eastern dissident facing persecution is none other than Jesus Christ. His long robe with his long hair and beard compliment the cruciform halo hovering over his head.

Without seeing Jesus, the military leader says, "Give him two years in immigration detention and then deport the scoundrel."

Now that's seeing separation and an enemy. And that kind of anger lights a fire that will warm the heart. The problem with that approach though is that that kind of fire ends up burning our souls.

Hamas on Thursday declared an end to a six-month-Old ceasefire with Israel in the Gaza Strip, raising the prospect of an escalation in cross-border fighting.

The European Union called for an "immediate cessation" of both rocket fire from Hamas and Israeli incursions.

There is a fire burning out of control in some hearts in the middle east and elsewhere. It's a tragedy we cannot fathom, even though we too are dissidents; yes we are dissidents.

A few minutes ago we did something that was criminal in Guatemala in the 1980's: the Magnificat. The choir, on our behalf so brilliantly sang the magnificat. Churches couldn't do that there then. This is "a revolutionary song of salvation whose

concrete social, economic, and political dimensions cannot be ignored. Mary's canticle praises God for the kind of salvation that involves concrete transformations..."

A dissident literally means someone who disagrees. We Christians disagree with the idea of warming our hearts through hating enemies.

We are dissidents also because we have a different approach. This is a different way of warming the heart. It is Mary's song, the Magnificat that sings of the love of God for the lowly and the abused, and about the transformation of history through God's love. This transformation began in today's Gospel.

Today's Gospel is the announcement, "the child to be born will be holy." As Christ is born into the world anyone who touches Jesus will be transformed.

A man in the fourth century named Cyril of Alexandria described it this way. "As iron when it is brought in contact with fire immediately begins to share its color, so the flesh when it has received the life-giving Word into itself is set free from corruption. Thus he [Christ] put on our flesh to set it free from death."¹

Apart from Christ, from ancient myths to the modern psychology of Freud, love and death are held together. Eros and thanatos are inseparable. This thought disturbs us but even these disturbing emotions can be a source of grace. For it reveals a secret longing in our hearts.

This longing is met through the meaning of the virginity of the Mother of God. The oxymoron - fruitful virginity - speaks of something new God is creating. In Christ, God separates love and death. Now because of the incarnation of Christ love is set free from death. Love is bound now to life that is inexhaustible and never ending.

And during this time of Advent, this time of expectation and waiting, hearts long for warmth that comes not from being angry at our enemies, but from the love that includes all people. We ought to really think about that in the land of Jesus' birth where there is so much separation and seeing in others who are different - enemies.

In Nazareth today, the town where Gabriel announced to Mary this new thing, there is separation and many are seen as enemies. The newer Upper Nazareth is comprised of Jewish settlements and is prosperous, while the lower city of mostly Arabs subsists in a twenty-first century apartheid.

A couple of weeks ago I heard in my soul a new message from the angel Gabriel speaking of everlasting justice and love as I met a friend Betsy Mayfield.

She said to me that for, "sixty years, 1.5 million people are forced to live in a refugee camp called Gaza,

¹ Quote from Cyril of Alexandria *Homily on Luke*, V, 19; Clement, 47.

those who agreed to live in the Jewish state of Israel have to do so under 20 plus Nationality Laws which regulate who can buy and sell land or get an education including what courses of study are allowed and forbidden, and accept second class citizenship in virtually all aspects of everyday life.

Those who were left on the West Bank or became refugees there have faced 60-years of social, physical and economic strangulation so that it is completely true to say that today the Palestinians are living in one of, if not, the, greatest man-made disaster/s of the modern world.”

I asked her, “What do the Palestinian people need?”

She told me, “an end to occupation, a renewal of life and liberty and the compassion our religions teach. This will only happen if we in America at a grassroots level insist that it happen ...”

But are there not other changes for peace and justice that will require our insistence? Darfur, Zimbabwe, Iraq. And here in this county: undocumented workers who endure work we would never do, yet suffer from exploitation and the daily possibility of deportation which now all too often separates parents from small children.

It can be difficult to image how God will ever work out justice in the world. We hear a lot about change these days. But to many these changes are just not possible. These conflicts have been going on for generations. We can feel that the past is fated to be repeated.

But that’s not the message of the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Like Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel, we can also say, “How can this be?”

How can it be that justice in the world will be realized? By preparing for Christ to be born among us *today*. We do that by remembering the words of the angel Gabriel, “the child to be born will be holy.” This holy child is born so that all of us would be holy. Too incredible to believe? Then also remember these words of Gabriel, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”