

I was talking to our two Kims (staff) this past Friday and they asked if I used other sources in preparing for my homilies – yes, I told them I have to do fair amount of reading and notes. I went on to say in this weekend, in particular, I will need a lot of help as I have to speak about two pregnant woman, Mary and Elizabeth. That is one area I do not have much experience. Perhaps I should call my mother, as she had a lot of experience in being pregnant with six of us.

We have many vivid images of Advent in the gospel: expectant waiting, joy over a coming promise, kicking and leaping in the womb, hope in rushing toward fulfillment. You, who are parents of young children, know all about the excitement this time of year and with it, some tension.

+The other day, after our Christmas concert on Monday, I was walking with a couple and a young son. He was really in wide open mode, walking next to me. Well, he saw the perfect mud puddle and slammed his foot into it as hard as he could, with water going all over. Now that is Advent excitement, kicking and jumping – it really cracked me up. We can say that boy is carrying a lot of energy, running in excitement toward the birth of Christ.

Both Mary and Elizabeth *carried* the same energy, carrying within themselves two individuals that will change the world forever and they are running with excitement for that awesome day.

And that might be our theme for the weekend, as we all ***carry something within ourselves*** as we journey toward Christmas.

We are told that Mary questioned, or perhaps we could say *she pondered* what all this might mean when told she would carry the Son of God. For us, to ponder might mean intellectual contemplation, but according to the Hebrew way of thinking, pondering meant *patiently carrying tension within one's soul*.

Mary and Elizabeth both carried two rather important infants, but they also carried within themselves the great tension of being chosen for so great a task.

+I have another priest who lives with me in the rectory – he heads up the tribunal and is also the vicar for the eastern vicariate (he travels there every weekend). He shared with me that on this Christmas, it would be 20 years since his mother died. I asked him if he had experienced anything from her since that day and he said in the beginning he could feel her presence, but as the years passed the feeling waned.

We both surmised that it might be because his mother had carried him, not just in the womb, but her whole life and perhaps initially she didn't want to let him go (thus his experience of her presence early on). Is it possible that there is even a little tension as we leave our loved ones in this world for the blessings of another?

We shared how wonderful it might be if God allowed us to talk with our loved ones who had died. I then added, but imagine the consequences of such a blessing – the expectation

and tension that would be placed upon us because of our being blessed in “*knowing?*” We would have no more excuses with the tension of such a blessing!

Yes, Mary was blessed to be the mother of God – to carry God within her womb and her heart was filled with joy over so great a privilege – and yet the very “blessedness” would also be accompanied by tremendous tension as the weight of the world pressed upon her son and herself. She carried the blessings, but also the great tension of her life ahead as the *mother of God*. Yes, she had much to ponder.

All of us carry within ourselves blessings and the tensions that accompany them.

+Think of the New Orleans Saints (scratch that, written before they lost) and Indianapolis Colts – what a blessing they are to be undefeated, but unlike any other team, they carry the burden of finishing the season undefeated, as now all are gunning for them. Can they carry it through to the end? How will they deal with the tension of it all? Maybe that is why the Redskins are playing so well (scratch that, written prior to Monday night’s game!) as they are no longer having any tension because no one expects them to win!

+Now take Tiger Woods, who is blessed with tremendous talent, but most certainly great tension. They said that what made him so great a golfer was his ability to handle the pressure, but in reality, he could no longer carry that tension as his whole life came unhinged in about 12...14...16 (and counting) ways...

+Being a priest is a great blessing, but with it comes the tension of great responsibility. It is an honor to being a rector, but with it carries a great deal more tension and understanding of what Mary may have pondered!

Yes, each of us has much to ponder in what we carry within ourselves and in trying to deal with the tension of it all. How might we deal with it all, as during this time of year, we often experience the greatest of tensions? Well, we can turn back to Mary, who gave flesh to the Word of God and proclaimed it her entire life.

+At weekday Mass the other day, I asked if anyone remembered how we used to say, “*This is the word of the Lord?*” I then asked if anyone knew why it was changed to, “*The word of the Lord?*” There were no takers.

If we place the bible on a shelf and never read it, will it mean anything? No, it becomes a bunch of words dying on a shelf. This is can be the implication when we say, pointing to the Scripture, “*this is the word*”. No, it comes to life in our proclaiming, “*The word of the Lord*” in the voice of our flesh. You see, when we proclaim it and live it; the Word takes on flesh in our very lives.

And there you have your answer (in how we can hold those tensions and blessings), for when we *in-flesh Christ* in our lives, when we *carry Christ in all we do*, the irony is that it is then that *he will then carry us* (with all our tensions).

By this I don't simply mean in the Eucharist or in the Word proclaimed that he does so, but in this Body of Christ, in *all of you*. When my priesthood becomes difficult or myself weak, it is often the words of the Body of Christ (that would be you) that carry me. For example, a written card or a comment can carry me as well as others.

When Christ is in-fleshed in you, when you carry him, it is in that he not only carries you, but carries *others through you*.

+I received a note this past week which said, "*Please leave this gift toward any need of the parish. Thank you for the "welcoming atmosphere" extended by your congregation to me, a visitor this past year.*" What was the occasion of their visit? A funeral for their son and they then attended Mass at the Cathedral the following Sunday.

That is what it means to say, *the Word made flesh*" in all of you, because you carried someone who could not carry themselves.