Fourth Sunday of Advent: Behold!

We are only a few days from Christmas. This is a busy time filled with parties, extra shopping, and, for many, getting ready to travel or to receive visitors. There are so many things that we have to do to prepare for Christmas.

Perhaps, too many. We should remember the story of Befana. That is one of my favorite Christmas stories. It's actually a poem:

Befana the housewife, scrubbing her pane,
Saw three old sages ride down the lane,
Saw three gray travelers pass her door,
Gaspar, Balthazar and Melchior.

"Where journey you, sirs?" she asked of them.

Balthazar answered, "To Bethlehem,
"For we have news of a marvelous thing,
Born in a stable is Christ the King."

"Give him my welcome,"

Then Gaspar smiled,
"Come with us mistress to greet the child."

"O happily, happily would I fare,
"Were my dusting through,
and I polished the stair."

Old Melchior leaned on his saddle horn,
"Then send but a gift to the small Newborn."
"O gladly, gladly, I'd send him one,
"Were the hearthstone swept
and my weaving done.

"As soon as I've baked my bread,
"I'll fetch him a pillow for his head,
"And a coverlet too," Befana said.

"When the rooms are aired and the linen dry,
'I'll look to the babe,"

But the three rode by.

She worked for a day, and a night and a day,

Then, gifts in her hand, she took up her way.
But she never found where the Christ Child lay.

And still she wanders at Christmastide.
Houseless, whose house was all her pride.
Whose heart was tardy, whose gifts were late,
Wanders and knocks at every gate.
Crying, "Good people, let the bells begin.
"Put off your toiling and let love in."

That is precisely what we need to do. We need to make time for what really matters. We need to focus on the whole meaning of Christmas and let love in.

We are so tied down to our Christmas routines that we do not give enough time to consider why the birth of the Christ is so significant. The Christ event, from the birth of the Word Made Flesh to his death, resurrection, Ascension and the Sending of the Spirit, the Christ event is the center of human history. All meaningful actions of human history that took place before Bethlehem pointed to the Word Becoming Flesh. Every meaning event that takes place after Bethlehem takes its meaning from the Christ event.

From today's second reading:

To him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages , but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever.

I fear that in these times of political turmoil, concerns about artificial intelligence, and so many other fears that lead many to anxiety, we have gotten so tied up in the events around us, as important as they are, that we have lost our focus on the One Event that matters: God has entered human history by becoming one of us. He has restored the spiritual life that mankind willingly sacrificed to pride and materialism. He has defeated the power of evil with the power of love. He has destroyed arrogance with humility. He has returned the disobedient to obedience to God.

And so, we must behold. To behold is not just to see. It is to see and understand what is being seen. We behold the young girl, the virgin, who had been prepared from her conception to become the vehicle for the Word to become flesh. We see and we understand that God has placed his plan for our salvation in her hands. And we hear her say, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." She sees the angel and she understands what is being asked of her. She is willing to let salvation history take place through her.

And so, we behold. We see and understand that all the incidents and incidentals of life are trifling affairs in comparison to the greatest event to ever take place, the Birth of Jesus. We behold that we have been called into the heart of mystery, into the heart of God.

"Our hearts were made for you, O Lord, and they cannot rest until the rest in you." St. Augustine had it all together. We are always longing. We are always seeking. We are always desiring. But the only desire that fills us is the desire for Christ. And so, we conclude Advent with the fervent prayer: Come Lord Jesus. Come, love of our lives.

Behold! See and Understand this: we are given the celebration of Christmas to come closer to God. We are given this feast to recognize that he alone can answer our needs.

Take time this week. Make time this week. Make time on Thursday night, the holiest night of the year, to talk to God about the significance of Christmas. Take time to behold, see and understand that the child of Bethlehem has changed the history of mankind.

May we all have a Holy Christmas.