

HOMILY

The Second Sunday of Advent December 6, 2009

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

There is a story about two men, both seriously ill, who occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the only window in the room. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

When the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the outside world. The man by the window described so much detail the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. Unexpectedly, an alien thought entered his head: Why should he have the pleasure of seeing everything while I never get to see anything? It doesn't seem fair. As the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, his envy eroded into resentment and soon turned him sour. He began to brood. He should be by that window. That thought now controlled his life.

Late one night, as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help. The other man never moved, never pushed his own button which would have brought the nurse running.

The following morning the day nurse arrived. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away—no words, no fuss. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look.

Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all for himself. He strained to look out the window beside his bed. It faced a blank wall.

I like this story because it fits in with Paul's *Letter to the Philippians*. He isn't writing it from the Hilton Tower in Rome but from a dingy cell in a Roman jail. It might come as a shock and surprise to you today, but one third of Paul's letters were written from various prison cells. Just think about it, how various blank walls could have created a different scenario. Instead of quitting like many people do when life dealt a harsh hand, Paul declares, "*I count it all joy, and so too must you. I pray that the good work God has begun in you will bring it to completion.*" Instead of complaining and moaning when life puts us before a blank wall, never forget the ultimate goal of life—to let Christ in.

It is said that the difference between a piece of coal and a diamond is pressure. The difference between an admirer of Jesus Christ and a faith-filled servant is how we handle the pressures of life and how we allow them to color our world.

Paul learns in prison and shares with us that when we cannot see the way, it is wise to stay close to the one who does. Thus, along with Paul, we have the voice of John the Baptist: "*Decrease in your selfishness, let the Lord increase.*"

A Swedish fisherman went with his two sons on their daily fishing run. By mid-afternoon the waves were rolling higher than usual. The wind increased; the waves grew quite large. The fierce storm put out the light in the lighthouse on shore leaving the fisherman groping in the dark. Meanwhile, in the kitchen of their rustic cottage, a fire broke out. Before the wife and the mother could put out the fire, it destroyed their every earthly possession except the clothes on their backs.

Finally the father and the sons were able to row the boat safely to shore. Waiting on the beach to tell them the tragic news of the fire was the wife and the mother. "Dad," she tearfully said, "fire has destroyed our house and all our possessions. We have nothing now."

But Karl seemed strangely unmoved by the disconcerting news.

"Didn't you hear me, Karl? Our house is gone!"

"Yes, I heard you," he replied. "But a few hours ago we were lost at sea and death seemed mighty close. Our only guide to the shoreline, the light in the lighthouse on the cliff, went out. For an hour I thought death would be our lot. Then something

happened. A dim, yellow light appeared in the distance. Then it grew bigger and bigger. We turned our boat and followed it safely to shore.

“You see, Ingrid, that little yellow glow was the first sight of our house burning. At the peak of the blaze, we could see the shoreline as bright as day. The same heat that destroyed our house created a light which saved our lives.”

Paul wrote to a church that was fragile. Paul did not want them to give up but to keep on keeping on—having Christ before them. Paul encourages us to walk not by sight, but by faith, to seek the way of the Lord.

Starting today, may we spend our lives opening ourselves to the vision of life that God has for us so that we will not see blank walls but lives filled with purpose with God and the focus and destination of our journey.

