

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent - Year C - 2006 - Micah 5:1-4; Luke 1:39-45

To be an American growing up in the 1960s, or for that matter the 70s the 80s as well as the 90s, is to remember Star Trek.

- a. That single TV show transformed our expectations of the future.
  - i. Many of the things that Star Trek had in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century;
    - (1) such as personal computers and communicators
  - ii. we already have in the 21<sup>st</sup>,
    - (1) in the form of laptops and cell phones.
  - iii. Some things, such as racial integration and equality of the sexes,
    - (1) we are still working on,
  - iv. And some things, such as transporters and space ships
    - (1) are still a ways off.
2. However, no one is perfect, not even Gene Roddenbery, the creator of Star Trek.
  - a. For he predicted something in Star Trek which has definitely NOT come to pass
    - i. quite the opposite in fact.
  - b. It does not have to do with what Star Trek had;
    - i. but what it did NOT have.
  - c. For tell me; what religion was Captain Kirk? Where did they go to church? Did faith ever play a role in their decision making? The answer is no.
  - d. And that is because Gene shared the general belief of the 1960s
    - i. that as science advanced and society evolved,
      - (1) religion would cease to exist.
3. Boy was he wrong!
  - a. Because in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century religion is everywhere:
    - i. It influences **political decisions** on everything
      - (1) from contraception, to stem cell research,
      - (2) from gay marriage to whether or not Teri Schiavo should have been kept alive.
    - ii. It influences **world events**,
      - (1) from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the ongoing violence between Jews and Palestinians.
      - (2) It inspires Muslims to become suicide bombers and Christians to kill abortion doctors.
    - iii. It influences **personal relationships**,
      - (1) From the way we talk about our religious commitments
        - (a) - are you a *Merry Christmas* or a *Happy Holidays* person?
      - (2) To the way in which we judge the commitments of others
        - (a) -such as when people ask us if we are Catholic or Christian

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- as if Catholics were not REALLY believers in Jesus Christ
- (b) or when we in turn call Muslims *terrorists* or Jews *money-hungry* or engage in any religious prejudice.)
4. And moreover, it doesn't long to figure out why Gene Roddenbery was wrong:
    - a. Just talk to anyone for whom faith has become a militant matter of principle
      - i. and you will see that it is precisely the advance in scientific knowledge and the evolution of society Gene predicted in *Star Trek*
        - (1) that has produced the explosion of religious devotion we see - why?
      - ii. Fear. Fear that in a world that is changing so rapidly,
        - (1) we are on the verge of losing everything most important to us.
        - (2) and thus we look for something familiar to hold onto;
          - (a) and for many people that something is religion.
        - (3) because we are told God does not change
          - (a) and if we stick with God, then we don't have to either.
  5. I understand this fear of change.
    - a. One of the things I love about the Catholic faith is that we have a tradition
      - i. which gives stability to what we believe and what we do.
  6. And yet on the eve of that most traditional of Christian celebrations
    - a. we hear voices
    - b. traditional voices,
    - c. ancient voices;
    - d. voices coming from the heart of our tradition, the Bible.
  7. we hear Micah, proclaiming to the people of Judah
    - a. that everything they had expected,
    - b. everything they believed
    - c. everything that they knew *had* to be the case . . . was wrong;
      - i. for God would NOT raise up their new king-messiah from any of the great and powerful houses of Judah,
      - ii. but from a clan named Bethlehem Ephrathah, so small that they barely had one little hovel of a village for themselves. - WHY?
  8. We hear Elizabeth crying out that her cousin Mary
    - a. who at 13 is unmarried and pregnant
    - b. a curse punishable by death
      - i. Is blessed -WHY?
  9. We hear the author of the Book of Hebrews proclaim
    - a. that all the sacrifices that the people of Israel had used for thousands of years to

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- maintain their relationship with God
- b. were now ended in the one sacrifice of Jesus - WHY?
- 10. Precisely because what we have been told, what we have put our faith in and in some cases have sworn to fight to the death for - is a lie.
  - a. Because in that book which forms the heart of everything we believe about God,
  - b. and in the birth of that child whom we believe is God, come in the flesh,
  - c. God is revealed as the one who **by definition** does what is new.
- 11. WHY?
  - a. Because God wants to frighten us
    - i. by threatening everything we believe is true?
  - b. No! because God wants to banish our fears,
    - i. by revealing the one thing that IS true;
  - c. That God doesn't change.
    - i. But that if we want to remain faithful to God ,we have to be willing to.
- 12. One thing many of us might not remember about Star Trek,
  - a. indeed most science fiction back in the 1950s and 60s
    - i. was that it was often criticized by conservative Christians.
  - b. Precisely because it promised a world where people achieved peace and justice without religion.
  - c. Nowadays there are many who wish it WERE that way,
    - i. given that religion is one of the major reasons
      - (1) why there is no peace, and so little justice.
  - d. Many people blame God for this
    - i. saying that God has been remarkably silent
      - (1) on the state of the world of late.
- 13. But just suppose for a moment that God is NOT silent;
  - a. that God in point of fact is **speaking** to us all the time;
  - b. that God is literally **shouting** at us every Sunday
    - i. and is practically **jumping up and down** before us in the birth of Jesus
      - (1) Just to get our attention
  - c. What would God be saying to us that we SO MUCH do not want to hear?
    - i. God would be saying that the challenges and changes in the world around us are not diabolical threats to every thing we hold to be true.
    - ii. But are God at work in ALL the events of our world,
      - (1) even those which might seem to be most God forsaken,
      - (2) Challenging our **judgements**,
      - (3) challenging our **prejudices**,

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- (4) challenging our **hardness of heart** and
- (5) our **lack of compassion**,
- iii. Changing the things we cling to like the idols of old,
- iv. so that WE will change,
  - (1) and in that change we will see God doing
    - (a) what God did in Israel;
    - (b) what God in Mary,
    - (c) what God did in Jesus,
    - (d) and what God wants to do in us. Something new.