

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, February 2, 2021

Mid-Winter Silliness and Solemnity

I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is a gift of God. —Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

*It is better to go into the house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of every man;
the living should take this to heart. —Ecclesiastes 7:2*

Groundhog Day is now upon us! Thank God that this blessed distraction from the gloom and cold of the mid-winter is here to bring us a little comic relief. I am told that the usual festivities had to be cancelled due to COVID restrictions, so I wonder if Octorara Orphie is going to Zoom his results. In my former congregation in the south end of the county I had numerous members of the Groundhog Lodge among the flock, and came to appreciate the ceremonial night shirts and top hats, and their annual prognosticating sessions. One of my more enthused groundhogs would put on as serious a face as he could and gravely caution me against believing any predictions offered by “that Punxsutawney imposter!” He knew deep down that Orphie was the genuine article and all others were to be scorned! It was a lot of good fun at a time of year when some good fun was much in order.

This is also a great time for the Super Bowl, as such a distraction is the medicine needed for this grey season. Not only is it a joy for the true football fan, but the non-fan will find it an enjoyable festivity as most of the attendees at your average Super Bowl party do not even follow football and the television provides a host of foolishness around the game to keep all viewers entertained. This time of year, was made for such events, and a little bit of silliness is good for the soul.

This is also a time when Lent, the solemn forty-day season of Easter preparation begins. We start with the very picture of solemnity—the Ash Wednesday communion service where traditionally we have received the ashes of mortality and repentance. The following Wednesday evening gatherings are not quite so somber, but they are times to examine our lives and to look to God’s promise of life and salvation. It is a time to anticipate the new life of spring and to be assured that the present pall of cold and dormancy will not be the last word. In these observances our souls are renewed and we find a joyful hope. Ash Wednesday is the 17th, and I encourage all to mark your calendars now for that holy date and for the precious Wednesdays which

follow. This time of year was made for such events, and a little bit of solemnity is good for the soul.

While I usually have difficulty finding good things to say about the dead of winter, I have learned that it is a season with a reason. It is a time which forces us to seek hope and joy, and this is a pilgrimage which we all do well to walk. The gloom and the lamented “winter blahs” are no trivial matter and need to be addressed with real deliberateness, and I would urge all to have a multi-dimensional response to this annual challenge. A little silliness and celebration does us all a lot of good in these days, and this is nothing less than a gift from our God. If invited to a Super Bowl party, my advice is go, even if you are not a fan. But the solemn grey skies also call us to another source of renewal. Lent is a rich and renewing season for all who will avail themselves of its blessings, whether they be ashes, a craft, a prayer walk, or a time for spiritual discussion. This is indeed a gift from God, not to be missed.

This is a particularly challenging winter as the COVID virus has added to the sadness. When facing such a formidable foe a one-two punch is a wise strategy. May God refresh you in these days with His gifts of silliness and solemnity.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Grant to us, O Lord, the royalty of inward happiness, and the serenity which comes from living close to thee. Daily renew in us the sense of joy, and let the eternal Spirit of the Father dwell in our souls and bodies, filling every corner of our hearts with light and grace; so that, bearing about with us the infection of good courage, we may be diffusers of life, and may meet all ills and cross accidents with gallant and high-hearted happiness, giving thee thanks always for all things. —Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850-1894