

*Caryl* When we see John the Baptist in our community, we know it's really Advent! It's great to have you with us, John!

*Shaen* It's good to be back from the wilderness.

*Caryl* John is making his 4<sup>th</sup> appearance in 4 years and is usually the one who lays the groundwork for our homily, just as he prepared the way for Jesus back in the day. This morning, however, 21<sup>st</sup> century John and I will speak from different perspectives on today's gospel message, whose focus is seeing.

The question Jesus posed to the crowds he also poses to each of us: "What is it that you go out to see?" When we go out into the moments of our lives, do we see the prophetic message all around us? What is it that we came here to see today at Mary Magdalene? Jesus urges us to see the God that comes to expression in ordinary, simple moments, as well as in deep and far-reaching ones. Let's together take a long, loving look at a couple of these prophetic moments.

John, could you share an experience in your life where prophets have spoken?

*Shaen* An example of when I've experienced prophets today is when I am working at United Sports Training Center in Downingtown. I work there in a program called Lil Kickers who have soccer sessions for children from 18<sup>th</sup> month olds up to 7 year olds. The experience of watching the unconditional parental and familial love between children and parents or relatives as they walk to and from the fields hand in hand for their session; the sense of pride a child shows during the water break as he or she tells the caretaker the accomplishment achieved such as scoring a goal, passing well to teammates, or playing well on defense; the joy and friendship bonds of session mates, of working together, are all examples of being prophets of God's lesson of love and trust.

*Caryl* You spoke about the heart of these moments. How were you able to see beyond the surface experience into the heart of it?

*Shaen* I look to see Christ in all aspects of my life and the expressions shown from children and the twinkle in their eyes with their parents make it easy to see God with them. I recognized early on from positive experiences witnessing God but it took reflection to witness the God in other moments and classes that were challenging. Accepting both the easily discernible -and less so- allows the voices and messages of prophets I witnessed to be seen and heard.

*Caryl* Thanks, John, for sharing your experience.

*Shaen* How about you, Caryl. Have you had a prophetic experience?

*Caryl* Well, it's an experience quite different from yours. It began here last month during the homily response. Joanne Reges was responding to the homily message on how life comes forth from struggle. She shared some of Claude Thomas's book, *At Hell's Gate*, his personal story of transformation from being a soldier in Vietnam through years of addiction and finally to healing, inner peace, and ordination as a Zen monk. I was so touched by Joanne's words that I bought the book and read it. I found his story compellingly prophetic. Throughout my reading God was jumping off the page and into my heart. I thought of our friend Jim who served in Vietnam and how he has worked through the emotional and mental anguish of losing buddies. My emotions ran high as I thought of all the people who have taken someone's life or health, whether they be military or civilians, and all the families whose loved ones were harmed or killed. Even when we come to forgiveness, what do we do to right the wrong we've done or experienced? Through his story and these personal reflections I came to see more deeply—an Advent seeing, if you will—that we are all connected through our common humanity, the mystery of suffering we all experience, and our desire for inner peace.

Caryl Conroy Johnson and Shaen Conroy Johnson

Two of his experiences I found especially noteworthy. The 1<sup>st</sup> was a retreat experience in France with Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Claude Thomas lived there with a number of Vietnamese people. He longed to apologize and make amends to them for the destruction and killing he had done in Vietnam, but he didn't know how to do it. The Vietnamese had already been told of his war experiences and struggles, and they loved him into healing. I saw and felt God in *their* love and forgiveness and in *his* desire to make amends. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was a walking pilgrimage from Auschwitz to Vietnam. He prayed at different places along the way for all who were part of the events there. As I read his account and felt my heart journey deeper into these wrenching experiences, I felt a prayerful connection even with those who caused the anguish. In this moment I came to see the real pilgrimage is one of the heart. Claude says this of his pilgrimage: "I went to practice peace, to be peace, but I was not walking expressly for peace. Peace is not an idea...or a political movement... Peace is a way of life, living mindfully in the present moment." (*At Hell's Gate*, p. 109) Claude Thomas said on his pilgrimage walks that he talked with people about healing and how it starts with one's self. Then healing can spread to family and community. His words of healing and inner peace are indeed prophetic.

Joanne was the prophet that invited me into Claude Thomas's message. Thanks, Joanne. Claude was a prophet in word and action. He touched me profoundly and brought me more deeply into the womb of God. To assimilate his profound experiences and insights, I had to stop at several junctures and *reflect* in order to *see* what God was saying to me through Claude. Reflection is one way of living mindfully in the present moment—helping us to see God in that moment.

Whether it is a simple, beautiful moment like John shared—thank you, John—a painful moment transformed, or another kind of moment, God invites us to take a long, loving look at its

Caryl Conroy Johnson and Shaen Conroy Johnson

prophetic message. As we walk through this final week of Advent, let us do so with expectancy.

Expect to see God. Expect to be God to others.

Come to the moments of your life with a prophet's heart—look for and *see* the One who lives in you and around you, and embraces you lovingly.

*Scripture Readings—3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent*

Isaiah 35: 1-6a, 10

James 5: 7-10

Matthew 11: 2-11