

Religion

Terra Cotta Community Centre in difficulty

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They say there's magic in the first snow of the season. Well I wasn't looking for magic. It was Sunday night and I'd had a long day, I was tired and didn't need this miserable snow storm to have to drive through. I got out of my warm truck and stepped into the white stuff. There wasn't a lot of light, but what there was reflected softly on the downlike blanket that covered everything. It was as if the world had just snuggled into the blackness of night.

At the door of the little wood frame building - all edged in forest green, someone stood in

their shirt sleeves and extending a strong handshake said, "Come on innnnn!" (It made me feel as though I was stepping into a Norman Rockwell painting.) He opened the door and before I was completely in the room ... there it was - the magic - I mean - It was like - well, like this incredible sense of being home.

I know that the familiar scent hanging heavy in the air, of beef roasting in the kitchen, accented with the well-known aroma of coffee warms the human spirit at the worst of times. But there was ore to it than just "things familiar." I knew a few of the people, but not many. They were all seated, ready for dinner, when I entered all eyes looked up and everyone

smiled. I could have been anyone and they would have beamed with a warm welcome. I think that's what started it - the hospitality of the people. But there's something about the building too - maybe years of people gathering and sharing has soaked into its walls causing a glowing of past warmth. Or perhaps the fact that it used to be a church, causes it to give off a hint of heavenly things.

As hard as I try I can't explain it. But perhaps it doesn't need explaining. Perhaps it is enough to know that places like this exist. Places like the Terra Cotta Community Centre - where people gather, where strangers feel at home. It seems to me that at our

place in history we are spending a great deal of energy and money on great huge structures like the Dome, where one can't help but feel - "alone in the crowd." Places like the Community Centre in Terra Cotta are becoming a thing of the past, a part of our history.

Currently this little fellowship is in great financial difficulty due to major repairs. I pray that the community of the surrounding area will realize the great need that this centre - this gathering

place, meets for the people of Terra Cotta. It is the spiritual centre in an area where there is no church. It is a place where God's children come together to share and to learn to love each other. Perhaps this Christmas we might find a way to help this tiny community hold on to its centre - its heart. This is what Christmas is really all about, isn't it? - things of the heart.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew VI, 21.

The trouble with time

By JIM RYAN
First Sunday of Advent
Mark 13:33-37
Dec. 2, 1990.

TROUBLES WITH TIME

Ten years ago I was living in an old three-storey brick former-convent in the downtown area of Detroit called Corktown.

It's a collection of small wooden cottages blocked in by the bridge and 175 on the west, the Detroit River to the south, and a strip of old and abandoned factories to the east. It has been the home for a strong and vital Irish working class community.

Times have changed of course. The Irish have moved out of Corktown to the suburbs of Dearborn and Royal Oak. The really successful ones, the lawyers, judges and politicians of Detroit, have moved to Grosse Pointe, another riverside community a few miles east of Corktown, where the cottages of their grandparents could fit into their new living rooms.

But even the Grosse Pointers come back to Corktown every year on St. Paddy's day to Holy Trinity Church.

The place where their grandparents were married, and their parents were baptized, now holds a fund-raiser for the current poor of Corktown, Hispanic immigrants. They have a drop-in center, health clinic and legal-aid center.

"Wow, this should be something. The Rich who recognize their solidarity with the Poor."

I got dressed up and sat shoulder to shoulder with a packed house of tweed, wool and velvet suits, inside Aquascutum raincoats.

I saw a church full of men and women who had the same features as my father and my grandmother; the same features as my uncles and aunts. I felt at home.

Until the speakers got up. It was the worst kind of nostalgia, sentimental and self-congratulatory. Story after story of the old days, old connections, old Irish roots.

Nothing was said about the current situation of Corktown or Detroit. There was no connection made between their grandparents and the current grandparents of Corktown.

WISE TIME-TRAVELLERS
After Holy Trinity, I went across town to East Grand Nursing Home.

It was a relief. I had been working there for a year.

These people didn't live sentimentally in the past. I'd never met people with such an ability to laugh at themselves.

The men told stories and made jokes; the women flirted with me.

It was a place and a people full of hope.

Advent is a season for the people of East Grand Nursing Home. It's a season for all people who yearn for true peace and justice. It's also a season for people who know how to live with time.

Advent reflects on the first coming of Christ in the past, the present absence of Christ, and

the future return of Christ in the Second Coming. There is a commemoration of a past event, but, at all times, not just during Advent, a constant yearning for the final establishment of the Kingdom of Christ.

NO DAMN GOOD

The old charge that Christianity focusses so much on the next life that they're no damn good in this one is perhaps true for Christians of a particular time and place, but not necessarily true. The only way to prepare for the life of paradise is to live as if it exists right now. That means living in the present: have a sense of humour, do the little things.

You could even compare the Christian who lives only for tomorrow, with the politician or social climber who only does something because of where it will get them.

Living with time has never been easy.

The Early Church had a few problems in this area.

There was such a heightened

sense of the return of Christ that some people from one of Paul's churches stopped working. They thought, "Why pay the mortgage, or my union dues. Why go to work, it'll all be over soon."

"Well," Paul said, "no good. That won't work."

The people on East Grand Blvd. in Detroit had learned how to walk the difficult line that leads from the past through the present into the future.

SOME TIME IN ADVENT

The season of Advent started in the fourth century in Gaul. In the fifth and sixth centuries, it developed into forty days of fasting in preparation for Christmas, not unlike the forty days preparation of Lent for the Easter Triduum.

In the four weeks of Advent, we look ahead to the Second Coming in the first week; and then back to the preparation for the first coming of Christ in the second and third weeks; and finally in the fourth week to the first stages of the first coming.

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Town Engineer
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