

- O LORD, *you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.*
 - As a pastor, I have spent a good deal of time thinking about and praying with my Dad. He died when I was 13 and it is only in reflection now I am coming truly to appreciate him.
 - He traveled a lot and was the disciplinarian so we were scared of the oft heard phrase – “Wait ‘til your father gets home.”
 - Thinking back now, though, I see so much more in retrospect.
 - He was a relatively quiet man. He listened a lot and when he spoke, his words mattered. He was serious without being too heavy, had an impish side, loved a good joke.
 - He was a patient man – Good Lord, he was patient! When he taught, he would think of hundreds of different ways to help us understand, staying with us until we did. Unless we weren’t paying attention, then we got the slightly raised voice and the full name: Robert
 - And he was patient in the discipline. We always had at least one expressed warning before we got spanked: “Robert, this is your warning.” But there were several others as well.
 - He was a trustworthy man, who meant what he said and said what he meant. This was as true for his customers as it was for us. He was an international salesman and I remember him working the phones to move heaven and earth when, through no fault of his own, there were problems with one of his sales.

- But most of all, he loved his wife and his kids. He loved to spend time with us, even when we were working around the house – we all had chores. He worked his job, spent his energy, gave his life for us, not hesitating to sacrifice himself if it meant a better opportunity for us.
- And as I have become a pastor, a spiritual father, I think about his excellent example, reflecting on being trustworthy, on saying what mean and meaning what I say, on being patient, quiet and listening more, on moving heaven and earth to solve a problem for another and, most of all loving you, my family.
- All of this was in my heart as we entered the season of Advent with today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah: *O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.*
 - Advent is the time of waiting and preparation.
 - At first glance, Advent may seem somewhat artificial. After all we seem to be preparing for something that has already happened, waiting for someone who has already come.
 - But Advent is far more than preparing for Christmas. Advent is about preparing for Christ, about recognizing Him as He comes even in our darkness and preparing a place for Him.
- Remember Christ comes to us in three ways:
 - He **came** to us in **history**: as a man born into poverty, born a stable, beneath a star.

- And He will come again in **majesty** at the end of time as we celebrated last week on the Feast of Christ the King with all His glory offering God's final and righteous judgment.
- In between these two comings, Christ He also comes to us every day in **mystery**. Veiled in the sacraments under the forms of bread and wine, in the words of absolution and the healing power of anointing. And more than that in the joy of a child, or the wisdom of our elders, in sacrifices offered and mercies received. He comes to be with us.
- There was no welcome for Him when He came in history, forcing Him out into the stable. And we'll have no choice but to recognize and welcome Him when He comes in majesty as every knee will bend and head will bow.
- But how do we welcome Him now? This very question is the reason for this holy season.
 - Advent is a season of hope, not the greeting card kind of hope but the gritty hope that recognizes even if only intellectually at first how close God is and how much God wants to come into our hearts and our lives.
- Sounds a little pie in the sky, doesn't it. All warm and fuzzy but actually recognizing Christ and welcoming Him is hard work.
 - That's where the whole potter and clay comes in.
 - Just as it cannot be easy for the clay to be pulled and pushed, molded and prodded and shaped, so too, it is not easy to allow God to work us and fashion us into vessels prepared to welcome the Christ who so desperately wants to come to us.

- Two things here are essential; neither is easy. The First is quiet prayer and the second is active discipleship.
 - You know as well as I that it is no easy thing to make room in an already overcrowded schedule.
 - Prayer doesn't have to be long but it must be intentional and it must come every day, especially in these hectic days before Christmas. Take a few minutes in the quiet to encounter Christ, to allow Him to be present to you.
 - Think of it like stopping at the Divine Gas Station. Sure it adds a few minutes to the schedule, but if you keep putting it off, eventually there will be nothing left in the tank. Your spiritual get up and go, will have gotten up and gone.
 - Christ wants to be present to help keep you grounded, to remind you of the real reason for everything else. It may mean that some cookies don't get baked or that some presents are not perfectly wrapped but nothing is more important even if everything else seems more urgent.
 - Separate it from what comes before and what comes after. Make it a priority. Remember, as my Dad said, if it is important to you, you will find time, you will make time for it.

- Secondly, for our heavenly Father to mold us and shape us, we need active discipleship.
 - Active discipleship is something practical that helps you and another come closer to Christ.

- Perhaps you can come to daily Mass. Perhaps you can celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation at one of the regional penance services or at some of the other times right here in the pastorate:
 - Sunday mornings between Masses at St. Mary
 - Sunday evenings from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at HFCC
 - Tuesday mornings from 6:30 to 8:00 am at HFCC
 - Wednesday mornings from 8:15 to 8:45 am at St. Mary
 - Saturday afternoons from 3:30 until 4:30. at HFCC
 - Saturday afternoons from 4:15 until 4:45 at HFCC
- Perhaps you can call someone who is lonely or you can do just a little extra for someone in your life who's struggling. Work your way through Advent extending yourself to others, forgiving someone who has hurt you, reaching out to that prickly neighbor next door, sharing your toys..
- Perhaps you can turn off the TV one night a week and spend some time together as a family, maybe reading the Bible.
- Focus on preparing for those who will be swelling our ranks to celebrate Christmas. Don't think of it as a mob of people forcing you to curb your annoyance at their making parking difficult and sitting in your seat.
 - Think specifically and particularly of the people you want to know God's love and with whom you want to share that love. Imagine your friends and family here, those who are not here, those who do not understand, those who reject God, or even worse, think they have been rejected by God.

- Be like the Good Shepherd seeking out the lost, the straying, the sick and weak. Be like Jesus and gather those who are suffering. There is space enough for everyone and everyone should be infected with the love of Jesus Christ. No one should be immune.
- After you have thought practically about who those who will benefit from being infected with the love of Christ, begin praying for them and asking God to help you open their heart and share the love of Christ.
- Ask God to open further your own heart that together we may create a space of true welcome, not only for Mass at Christmas but into our hearts and lives as well.
- We have a blank board in the back of Church. We want it filled with the people we desire to have here. We ask you to write down their names, both to keep it literally in front of you AND to show them when they come at Christmas how intentional you have been in preparing for them.
- Everyone needs to know that he or she is wanted and appreciated. You don't need to use full names or last names. Use initials or nick names or just first names.
- And we're trying to make it as easy as possible outside of here as well. Start with social media. Like us on Facebook so that all of your Facebook friends will see that we're focusing on being contagious rather than increasing numbers, that we seek to spread the love of Christ, not just going through the motions.

- Most importantly, remember that the potter who seeks to fashion us is our God, our heavenly Father.
 - Too often, we think of God only as the stern taskmaster, the One who pushes us and challenges us and punishes us.
 - Throughout this season, though, we will hear reading after reading about a gentle and patient God
 - who is always trustworthy,
 - who only says what He means and always means love,
 - who is patient and kind and gentle and merciful even in disciplining us,
 - who moved heaven and earth by offering His Son to solve our problems and,
 - most of all who loves us, His family, who delights in being with us and does not hesitate to sacrifice to offer us this opportunity of grace.
 - Remember, praying for someone is the best foundation for being invitational. Trust and hope in the Lord that He along with the Holy Spirit can do anything even allow you an opportunity to invite and share your faith.
 - There no better way to watch and remain alert than to allow ourselves to be fashioned by the Master potter, allow ourselves to be molded into the image of His Son who comes to us.
- *O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.*