

**Sunday December 21 – Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
*Prepared by Fr. Douglas Venne, MM – Dhaka, Bangladesh*

[Second Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16](#)

God promises to fix a place for the people Israel; to plant them so that they may dwell in their place without further disturbance.

[Romans 16:25-27](#)

Justification and salvation for all are available through faith.

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

The angel appears to Mary telling her of how she will bear a child.

In today's Gospel we witness the greatest event in the history of humankind: the Almighty, the Creator of all decided to become one of us, a stranger, an alien, a foreigner, a sojourner, an immigrant. Who can comprehend it?

In the first Joyful mystery of the holy Rosary, Mary conceives Jesus, her son, by the Holy Spirit. The word "conceives" can also mean to have an idea, a plan, a way. Who could ever have conceived of a God coming as a baby? Or learning from us, listening to us, interacting with us and even dying among and for us? It blurs the mind. Yet God conceived this and it became a reality. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

Jesus sojourned among us, came as a stranger and learned our ways. He accepted the graces of a simple home, studied, worked for a living, practiced the culture so he could understand this people, indeed, understand all human kind. *And then he traveled.* He saw the good; he recognized the evil. He read the hearts of those who could not read: the poor and the marginalized. He read the hearts of those who could read: the righteous, the powerful, and the rich. And he spoke the good news to them all. "Which of these three ... proved himself a neighbor to the man who fell into bandits' hands?"

How do I react with strangers? In the world today there are six billion plus people; in 70-80 years most of us will be gone, replaced by even more people. The world, even without the problems of global warming and natural upheavals, is being stretched to feed and serve God's greatest creation, humankind. Yet technical advances allow for greater food production, and statisticians calculate that there are sufficient resources for humanity.

Immigration laws favor the local populations. Investment bankers look for profits, not human development. Governments build walls, material and electronic. Individuals and communities scream, "No more immigrants." Abortionists claim an overpopulation problem and continue their profitable trade.

How can a just distribution of and for the population evolve?

Let's step back. The situation, or problem if you like that term, is not new. The Chosen People, Israel of old, were essentially a closed society but remembered their history. In their wisdom and from experience they recorded this in their scriptures: "When a stranger, an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest that one ... Treat the alien no different than yourselves. Have the same love for that one as for yourself. You were aliens in Egypt." We know Jesus read these words and brought them again before the people of his day, equating this law with love of God.

Not many of us are Native Americans so these words challenge us personally. Most of have an immigrant history and need to reflect on conditions in our own neighborhood. We can also learn from other peoples.

As a Maryknoll missionary, I lived and worked in Bangladesh in the same village area for some 30 years, an immigrant of a sort. I am from Wisconsin, which is has the same land area at Bangladesh, yet Bangladesh has 150 million people, and Wisconsin has five million. Needless to say, living conditions in Bangladesh are Spartan. Transportation and health services are minimal in comparison to the U.S. Foods need to be imported. (Cell phones are common.) But what I noticed was that the folks, adults and children are happy, can enjoy

themselves. Indeed, one year the World Bank declared that the Bangladeshis were the happiest in the world. Their desires and needs are simple. So the folks of Bangladesh teach us that people with small resources can live together in harmony, of course, with a lot of sharing of space and resources. That's the secret. Not many want to unravel it.

Twenty two years ago, my friends built a small bamboo house for me on land given to me for that purpose by Kashem Ali, a Muslim octogenarian and a very sensitive, open person. One day he pointed out a small monument to me and commented, "See, there is a Hindu death memorial. I did not destroy it when I bought the property." Then, pointing at the little mosque in front of us, "I built this for our family prayer." Stretching out his arm toward my little house he commented, "And over there is the house of a Christian, your house." The conversation ended there. I was astounded. Kashem was teaching me the message I had come to bring. Kashem was open to all people as he was to me.

When Kashem was 103, he called me to his house. He was covered with blankets even though it was hot out. Weakly he said, "I am dying." Perplexed, I replied, "We all have to die." Kashem continued, "If I have offended you or harmed you in anyway, please forgive me." My heart was in my throat: Kashem never did anything against me. I had heard many confessions but wondered if any were as sincere as this human being's. Kashem Ali died at 105, a person open to all.

The world needs Kashem's attitude if people are to live with one another in peace, accepting and sharing resources with the strangers among them. Laws won't do it; fences won't keep them out. They have a right to the use of the earth's land resources. A good exercise at this point would be to read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.\* What a wonderful document! So inclusive! It really shows what the human heart and mind are capable of, when they sit peacefully together as they did in San Francisco in 1948.

From the above written thoughts, perhaps two lessons can be pointed out for a just distribution of the world's land and goods.

First Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you made me welcome." (Mt. 25:35) This is the lesson for the person or community that has already put down their tent peg in that place. In accepting, accommodating the stranger, the immigrant, we are accepting Jesus himself as our friend. How simple, yet profound!

The other lesson we can learn is also from Jesus. "Make your own, the mind of Christ Jesus who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." (Phil. 2:5-7) St. Paul is telling the community to get their act together. The immigrant has to learn the culture, adapt to the role of a servant, non-violently, patiently but perseveringly working to become a native with the other local folks. Only in dialogue, only through friendship can we live in harmony in a round world where there are no corners, in a world that belongs to everyone.

*\*The [International Bill of Human Rights](#) consists of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) and its two [Optional Protocols](#). In 1966 the General Assembly adopted the two detailed Covenants which complete the [International Bill of Human Rights](#); and in 1976, after the Covenants had been ratified by a sufficient number of individual nations, the Bill took on the force of international law.*