

Fourth Sunday of Advent 2013

One of the greatest spiritualities that has helped and transform countless numbers of people is the 12-step program. The third step states: "Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. "There is a higher *plan* at work in all of our lives: God's Plan, which calls us to be free to surrender to what God wishes for our lives. This step is at work in the first reading with Isaiah pleading with Ahaz to accept a sign from God that would guide him in his leadership as King. But Ahaz would not or could not surrender to a higher plan because he had all the answers.

Joseph in the gospel is called "righteous" because he followed the Law and was a deeply religious man. When Mary confronted him with her pregnancy, one in which he had nothing to do with, he looked to the Law for an answer. Since he loved Mary he wanted the least painful solution that would protect her from a violent reaction, so he decided to "divorce her quietly." But in his dream, God spoke to him about a "higher plan," and asked Joseph to trust in this plan and surrender to a new way of seeing this difficult situation. He would "adopt" this child of God and raise him as his own. Joseph should be the patron saint of children who are adopted. Joseph turned his will and life over to the care of God.

God has a plan, a higher plan, for each one of us. God speaks to us in our dreams, our intuitions, in conversations with people we know and perhaps even strangers...he speaks to us in prayer and liturgy...in art and architecture and music...in countless ways. It is up to us to follow the wisdom of the third step: surrender our own self-made plans to a higher plan with a higher purpose. When we keep surrendering to God's love, our lives somehow make sense, even if we make some mistakes along the way. Ahaz wanted to rely only on himself and the results were disastrous.

The sign given to us is "Emmanuel" which means "God is with us." Yes, God is with us and within us, asking us to trust as Joseph trusted that when we try to follow God's will, our lives mean something. The greatest "sign" given to us is the Incarnation of God's Son. When Christ was born, he not only entered human history...he entered *our* history...*your* history. As Joseph adopted the child Jesus as his own, God "adopted" each one of us through baptism. Yes, we are *all* adopted...chosen by God to be a part of His plan to restore the world to its original beauty and holiness.

We are called to surrender to the way in which God is calling us as individuals and as a church to become a part of this "higher plan." By refusing to surrender to this plan, we become lonely and isolated. And God does not want this for any one of us...