2nd Sunday of Advent: 12/4/22—7:30 AM at St. Robert Bellarmine and 6:00 PM here

What are your dreams? For the minor league baseball player, his dream is to one day become a major league baseball player. For the first year medical student, her dream is to one day become a full-fledged physician. For those who work hard every day at a job that they don’t really like, their dream is to one day become independently wealthy. For a young couple struggling to raise their kids, their dream is one day to retire so that they can enjoy life and especially to enjoy their grandchildren. We all have dreams. Like Bloody Mary in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical “South Pacific” sings, ***You got to have a dream, If you don't have a dream, How you gonna have a dream come true?***

Our God has a dream for us, a dream symbolized by this little olive wood carving of a lion and a lamb. What a beautiful association of opposites we find in this 11th chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah: the wolf and the lamb, the leopard with the kid goat, the young lion and the calf, the bear and the cow, the baby playing at the cobra’s den, the child putting his hand where the adder lives. Our God’s dream isn’t so much that animals like these associate peacefully with each other, but our God’s dream is that his human animals, you and me, no matter what our differences, that we love one another, that we care for one another, that we forgive one another, that we help one another, that we respect one another, and that we look out for the needs of one another. In other words, God’s dream is that, in his Son Jesus, we become also his sons and daughters; that, in his Son Jesus, we become brothers and sisters of one another; that, in his Son Jesus, we show the same love to one another that he has shown us and continues to show us. While using different words, St. Paul describes that same dream in this way, ***For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*** ***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*.** (Gal. 3:27,28)

In our English language, there are some dark and scary words, such as “scorpion,” “cobra,” “shark,” “rabies,” even “Covid-19” to name a few. It strikes me that, to Catholics and to all Christian believers, the scariest word of all is the word **“They,”** “they” because we are pointing out separation, difference, and opposition. Think of the opposing terms that we hear all of the time: Democrats and Republicans, the Right and the Left, the rich and the poor, blacks and whites, conservatives and liberals, usually doing so with some lesser or greater degree of disrespect. By referring to those who are different from me as “They,” we have divided ourselves from one another when we all are called to be one family in Jesus with one Father.

The question for us is what can we do to come closer to fulfilling our God’s dream for us humans? What can we do? I think it starts with keeping in mind one of the most beautiful lines in all of Scripture, Isaiah 49:15-16, which go like this: ***Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? (Yet) Even should she forget, I will never forget you.See, upon the palms of my hands I have carved your name.*** What a tender and powerful image! How can a mother forget the child that she has carried in her womb for nine months? It’s really unthinkable, but, even if she should forget, our God tells us that he will never forget anyone of us. So special are each one of us to him that it is as if he has engraved each one of our names on the palms of his hands. How could anyone of us ever forget anything carved into the palms of our hands? It’s impossible because we would see that carving every time we used our hands. So too with God, any more than any one of us being able to forget something carved into our hands so it is impossible for God to forget anyone of us. It seems to me that remembering that line from Isaiah is the first step we can do to fulfill God’s dream. The second step would be our doing our best to live with that same love and respect that our God has for us, in other words, treating that other human being as someone whom God loves like a mother loves the child of her womb and treating that other person as someone whose name God has written on the palms of his hands.

If “they” is to be the scariest word of all to Catholics and to all Christian believers, how should we see each other? It seems to me that we need to see each other as **“We,”** “we” in that are all called to live as sons and daughters of one Father; “we” in that we are to become brothers and sisters of Jesus and one another; “we” in that we are to show the same love to one another as our God has shown and continues to show us. <https://radical.net/podcasts/pray-the-word/engraved-on-the-palms-of-his-hands-isaiah-4916/>