

Fourth Sunday of Advent 2016

December 18—He was the most celebrated personality of the 20th century, even now, he captures the hearts and love of millions with his recent elevation to sainthood. St. John Paul II was known as the “Pilgrim Pope” due to his hundreds of trips to foreign countries to visit his flock. No place was too far or beyond his pastoral reach, in fact, he visited 129 countries during his long pontificate.

On one of his trips, on the way to Australia, he decided to make a stop in Bangladesh. It is a small country and very poor, with a predominantly Muslim population numbering almost 100 million, and with a tiny percentage of Roman Catholics of about 115,000. But as he landed there, and was received warmly and with great enthusiasm by the nation’s leaders and its people, one could not help but notice the glow on the faces of the faithful worshipers who had travelled very far just to see him and even touch him as he passed by. They would hold up their babies for his blessing and genuflect reverently, many tearfully, as he traced the sign of the cross over the crowds. One reporter seeing all this put it quite accurately as he wrote: *“Obviously, the Holy Father does not solve their problems, but he does put them in a new perspective.”*

My friends, today we celebrate the fourth and final Sunday of this Season of Advent. We have journeyed each week in hopeful preparation for the coming of

the Savior. We heard the words of the Prophet Isaiah and his vision of peace. We listened to the impassioned cry of John the Baptist calling us to repent. We have each week tried to re-capture the anticipation that holy men and women of countless ages felt as they dreamed of a Messiah who would set them free and just like the Pontiff John Paul, of blessed memory, God knew that some things could not be done from a distance, and so in the fullness of time, he ventured out, as this Gospel tells us, to enter humanity, robed in flesh, to visit our world and to bring us hope. As you and I now stand on the brink of this *Season of Hope* that we call Christmas, we may notice a different world around us. There is something in the air, beyond the commercial hustle and bustle, something in us, and in the people around us, something in the children that changes the mood of even the gloomiest moment. It could be the familiar hymns, the brilliant decorations. It could be the fond memories of holidays past, but we know, and we believe, that it is more than that, like that reporter speaking of the Holy Father's visit, we surely know that although the problems in our life and our world have not been solved, our perspective has changed. We can see and feel and even touch the splendor of God's love for us, as He comes to us and we hear those words:

"Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they will name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us."

My friends, since He has chosen to be with us, let us in these late Advent days and in the Christmas days soon to come be sure that we choose to **be with**

Him. For He truly is Emmanuel—God with us!

God love you.