

“Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? And who can stand in his holy place?” To put it another way, who is worthy to stand in the presence of the Lord?

If we were to think of this place referred to in Psalm 24 as a mountain then there are several options. One could drive as some of you have done in the Rocky Mountain chain. One could hike the numerous trails up and down the Appalachian Mountain Chain.

Travel to the Holy Land and one could venture up 4,340 stairs to reach the Top of Mt. Tabor, believed to be the place of Jesus’ transfiguration. A visit to the top of Mt. Sinai at 8,625 feet above sea level may give you that feeling of standing on holy ground. Imagine standing on the ground where Moses received the commandments.

Now if you want to climb the highest mountain good luck to you reaching the very top of Mt. Everest at 29,029 feet above sea level. Dress warmly for it may be a little cold, not to mention windy.

The point however is that no matter what mountain peak we may stand upon, it will not bring us any closer to God in heaven. Those worthy of ascending

the hill of the Lord are those with clean hands and a pure heart.

Sinners that we are, when it comes to ascending into heaven the best we do is spin our wheels like tires on an icy hill. In fact, too often we keep our hands clean with hand sanitizer, which may be symbolic of not wanting to get our hands dirty in helping those in deepest need where life is quite frankly, messy.

Yes, in this late Advent season there is an emphasis on giving. We are mindful of those who are struggling and without. We do respond. However, does this make up for our silence the other ten or eleven months of the year?

Our hearts are too are stained by a host of sins. Our self-righteousness clouds our vision and obscures opportunities for compassionate care. Hearts that are cold toward the desire of forgiveness, hearts burdened by grudges carried, lack the purity needed to stand before the one who is perfect purity.

Much of our energy is devoted toward the temporal achievements. Awards, trophies, recognition, titles, honors can puff us up. Such achievements lead toward pride and a “look at me” form of self gloating.

These things can so very easily be stripped away from us with the violent force of a collision that knocks the air out of us, to the painful slow process of seeing all we are and have worked for slip away as we die.

Who among us is worthy to stand in the holy place, to see the beauty of God? Only one is able. The one who is worthy is the one who entered the world in all its messiness.

It is an infant born to a young woman betrothed to a carpenter. It is one that while heralded as the one to save his people from their sins has for his very first bed a feeding trough. Hay with a smattering of drool from sheep, goats or cows serve as his bed with the nearby stench of cow droppings with the flies hovering around.

Yes, it is not the sterile hospital room complete with doctors and nurses there to aid in the birth. Jesus enters this messy world in a very messy place, a manger.

This little child born of the Virgin Mary has come to accomplish what we cannot do by our own work or merit. He has come to create in us a clean heart.

Christ our Lord entered into the messiness of our world, to meet us where we are and to transform us. In other words, Jesus doesn't accept us just as we are in order to leave us this way. He meets us in our messy lives and through the depths of his love brings us into a new life in the here and now, with the promise of a new life to come in heaven.

Such a transformation is a costly one. The cost is a check we cannot cover, but one guaranteed by the very blood of Jesus.

For the one who has come into the world came with a purpose that is set out from the very beginning. He came to die. He came to redeem us. He came, creating in us a clean heart that only he could give.

Christ the Lord has come. He died, rose and ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of glory. Yet, at the very same time in the wonder of God, Emmanuel is with us.

Christ is here. His Word continues to lighten our way in this life, bidding us anew to be faithful. For here he offers himself fully in the very ordinary gifts of bread and wine that for us are the body and blood of Christ.

We are free from having to do the futile, earn our way into the kingdom. For it has been given to us. The faithful response is to tell this news. The faithful response is to live our lives with the certainty that what we believe is true. It is Jesus, who identifies himself as “The Way, the Truth and the Life” who will guide us to care for the poor, tend the brokenhearted, comfort the dying, heal the sick, teach the faith, lead our neighbors in using their skills, raise the orphan all the while making disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. As disciples of Jesus, he has made us the light of the world. Let your light shine for the glory of God. AMEN.