

12/22/13 4 Advent A

- Fr. Avery Dulles was a noted Jesuit theologian for many years. I had him for a course at Catholic U in the 1980's. He was made a cardinal in his later years, shortly before he died several years ago.
- He once said *Faith in God does not give you a ladder to crawl out of the human condition, but a drill to burrow into the heart of it.* It's a wise thought, and this gospel reading bears it out.
- To say that Joseph was in quite a pickle is a great understatement. In his day, betrothal was a much more formal process than engagement is today. To be unfaithful to a betrothed person was regarded as adultery.
- When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant and he knew he wasn't the father, he could only conclude that she'd been unfaithful. But he also knew her to be a good young woman.
- Perhaps, he might have thought, she was taken advantage of by another male family member. Obviously, no one would own up to that, and shame would still fall on Mary. (e.g. Saudi Arabia even now)
- Joseph faced some unpleasant choices. He could publicly accuse Mary, and he'd be off the hook. But she would face danger, possibly even death by stoning. In any case, she would be publicly disgraced in a society where honor was everything. No man would want her.
- He could do a private divorce and "limit the damage," so to speak. Both of them would pay for that in family gossip. He chose this path as the best of the bad options. Perhaps the responsible man would then claim Mary for his wife, so he may have thought.
- But he was challenged to change his mind. Could he trust this vision of his and take Mary as his wife? Friends and relatives would be able to count, and would figure, once the baby had been born, that they "jumped the gun." Both would take flack for that.
- Joseph trusted, knowing that life would not be easy. It had already thrown him a few curve balls, and that would continue. Joseph believed that the Lord would get him through this.

-- Here we are, only a few days from Christmas, and many of our families face problems and even crises. A couple of crises have arisen in my own family in the last several weeks.

-- Some people think that our faith should shield us from major problems, but it just doesn't work out that way. It certainly didn't for Joseph and Mary. The twists and turns of the human condition still apply to us, as they did to them.

-- Faith should help us drill deeply into our thoughts and feelings. It should call us to greater prayer and reflection. And, through that faith, we can reach out to those around us who may be facing even greater crises and sufferings than we are currently facing.

-- This weekend, our Parish Life Center is set up to minister to the needs of over 260 families and 700 children in our area. Through the generosity of the Knights of Columbus and many people in our parish and, indeed, outside it, they will have some comfort this Christmas.

-- But the trials of the human condition will continue for them after Christmas, as they do for us. When we are faced with those trials, we should lay them before the Lord in honest prayer.

-- Joseph did. One of the first liturgical changes Pope Benedict made was to include him in the main Eucharistic Prayers, because of his faith.

-- May we trust that the Lord's promises to us will be fulfilled. God may not give us a ladder to escape our trials, but he will carry us through them.