

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on December 20, 2009
Fourth Sunday of Advent – Liturgical Year C

I'm 71 this year. While that may not put me "over the hill", I'm well along the slippery slope! Do I like being 71? Not completely. There are some good aspects. I can look back on a very interesting life with a few accomplishments. Thank God, I can say.

But the big issue with anyone 71 is the body. I read somewhere that age is different for women and men. Women, it's said, experience age as appearance. Men do too, but with men, it's more about loss. First my eyes. What started out at 40 as "light lenses" is now the maximum. My driver's license says I'm not fit to drive without the glasses. Then the hearing. "What's that?" has become my favorite phrase. Hearing aids were inevitable. The psalms have a line: "All flesh is grass". I'm not very green any more.

The body isn't just about breaking down. Did you ever have a sore toe? I remember making a big speech once when my toe was killing me. "How did the speech go?" a friend asked later. "My toe is killing me!"

I replied. Then, too, I am supposed to be a person of mind and spirit, concerned with higher things. "I can do whatever I put my mind to." Who am I kidding? I need to lose 20 pounds, but a brownie or a chocolate chip cookie has me by the throat. My life is under the sway of a piece of candy. I eat, therefore, I am.

No wonder so many thinkers have concentrated on getting us out of the flesh, out of the body. Today lots of people are interested in "spirituality". The old Greek philosophers talked about the body as a prison. Maybe you're here today because you want a higher, spirited world. Well, think again. The coming feast of Christmas doesn't talk about getting out of the flesh. It says that the Word – the son of God – took on our flesh and moved right in with us.

We humans experienced our flesh as a problem, so God skipped in among us and assumed our troubled flesh. How strange! We think of God as spirit, as other. No, says Christmas. We are all animal, frail, finite, limited. God came to us because it was so hard for us to rise up to God.

At Christmas think of this. If you're out to meet God, you can do it here – that's where to find God. God didn't come to deliver us from our flesh, from our mortality. God came to save us, make us holy in our flesh. So say it: "The Word was made flesh and moved in among us". "He came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit and became flesh."

So maybe at 71, I'm not on the way down the hill. Even in my glasses and hearing aids and support hose, I can still find my way to God who takes Mary's flesh and mine at Christmas. That's a reason to celebrate!