

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10

DO YOU SEE THE EVERGREEN TREES?

In the winter, the Northern hemisphere is surrounded by nature in its phase of death and dying, barren trees and fields, frigid biting winds. The dormant world around us lays in a greyscale landscape — it doesn't offer much for the imagination. The bare branches, snow covered garden beds and sleeping tulip bulbs deep underground make it easy to forget the new life offered by God. This makes the birth of Christ in the dead of winter all the more meaningful for those north of the equator. In this cold, barren season, we can all benefit from a reminder of new life.

God has always promised life in the face of death, joy in the face of pain. Today's reading from Isaiah is one such example: "I will plant in the desert the cedar, acacia, myrtle, and olive; I will set in the wasteland the cypress, together with the plane tree and the pine, that all may see and know, observe and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it." (Isaiah 41:19-20) The image includes many trees, but do you notice the groves of evergreens, the cedars and pines promised by the prophets?

Even in the bleak Northern midwinter days, nature is not a complete barren wasteland. The evergreen trees are a reminder of our everlasting life. Green needles and long branches foreshadow the spring, a time of renewal and growth. As many of us welcome these trees into our homes, offices and places of worship, the image of the evergreen tree



asks us to have a longer vision, to look beyond to the days of great celebration in the season of Christmas. We welcome Jesus into our lives and hearts at Christmas, we look forward to the celebration of his death and resurrection, and we look forward also to our being welcomed into everlasting life.

As we stare into the evergreen, let us remember not the cold and barren world of today, but the everlasting life offered to us in the infant Jesus born in this frozen season. Those who work in the Catholic health ministry are called to be like the evergreen — reminding others that life persists even in the midst of death. It is not a simple role to play, but one required since we have accepted the call to provide care, comfort and hope. We walk with those who fear the end of life and serve as a reminder of God's word that the baby born into the world will bear to us everlasting life. In times of despair, let us look to this time of waiting for the birth of Jesus as an opportunity to reflect on our own hope for the future.

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