

This weekend we are told that Mary will be pregnant, and that Elizabeth is six months along. Paul at times uses the analogy of the pain of child birth, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." (Romans 8:22) And it is God who deliver us.

Though, as far as I know, Paul never had kids and so I am guessing someone told him about being pregnant and the experience of a child being born. All men, in reality and in particular, priests, have no idea what this entails.

Though in our Christmas eve pageants, Jesus seems to just pop out of the womb. Boom and it is done!

We have many vivid images of Advent in the gospel: expectant waiting, joy over a coming promise, kicking and leaping in the womb, hope in rushing toward fulfillment.

You, who are parents of young children, know all about the excitement this time of year and with it, though there may be some tension in all this. Gotta get it all done in a limited time frame.

+Some time back, during Advent, I was walking with a couple who had a young son. He was really in wide open mode, walking next to me. Well, he saw the perfect mud puddle and slammed his foot into it as hard as he could, with water going all over.

Now that is Advent excitement, kicking and jumping – it really cracked me up. We can say that boy is carrying a lot of energy, running in excitement toward the birth of Christ. He is also somewhat in impatient tension for all this to happened!

Both Mary and Elizabeth carried the same energy and tension, carrying within themselves two individuals that will change the world forever and they are running with excitement for that awesome day. I think of the VCU students taking exams. There is that great tension during this time, but a great joy in anticipation of what lies beyond.

And that might be our theme for the weekend, as we all carry something within ourselves tension and energy as we journey toward Christmas.

We are told that Mary pondered what all this might mean when told she would carry the Son of God. For us, to ponder might mean intellectual contemplation, but according to the Hebrew way of thinking, pondering meant patiently carrying tension within one's soul.

Mary and Elizabeth both carried two rather important infants, but they also carried within themselves the great tension of being chosen for so great a task.

+I have friend who is also a priest who shared with me some years back that his mother had passed on Christmas Day some thirty years ago. I asked him if he had experienced anything from her since that day and he said that in the beginning he could feel her presence, but as the years passed the feeling waned.

We both surmised that it might be because his mother, who had carried him, not just in the womb, but her whole life was perhaps, initially, found it difficult to let him go.

Is it possible that there is even a little tension as we leave our loved ones in this world for the blessings of another?

Yes, Mary was blessed to be the mother of God – to carry God within her womb and her heart was filled with joy over so great a privilege – and yet the very “blessedness” would also be accompanied by tremendous tension as the weight of the world pressed upon her son and herself.

She carried the blessings, but also the great tension of her life ahead as the mother of God. Tough enough in being a mother for the first time, but then add “the mother of God!”

Yes, she had much to ponder. All of us carry within ourselves blessings and the tensions that accompany our lives. We don’t have to be pregnant to realize this. I am blessed to be a priest, but also much is expected of me as is any parent.

Like any parent, we are to embrace this gift and tension. And yet, when we in-flesh Christ in our lives, when we carry Christ in all we do, the beauty is that it is then that he will then carry us (with all our tensions). That is the meaning of the incarnation, as it continues through you and me.

+I think of my parents who carried us when we were children, we have an obligation to carry them as Christ will each of us. I think of spouses, when one is sick or infirmed, it is up to the other to carry them. That what the Body of Christ does when working correctly.

When my priesthood becomes difficult or myself weak, it is often the words of the Body of Christ (that would be you) that carry me.

For example, a written card or a comment can carry you as well as others as you do so in their lives.

When Christ is in-fleshed in you, when you carry him, it is in that he not only carries you, but carries others through you.

+I remember seeing a note/donation many years back that said, “Please leave this gift toward any need of the parish. Thank you for the “welcoming atmosphere” extended by your congregation to me, a visitor this past year.”

What was the occasion of their visit? A funeral for their son and they then attended Mass at the Cathedral the following Sunday.

That is what it means to say, the Word made flesh” in all of you, because you carried someone who could not carry themselves.