

1st Sunday Advent Year “C”

November 28-29, 2015

As we wait in joyful hope

Readings: Jer. 33:14-16; 1 Thess 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28,34-36

Today begins a new year in the life of the Church’s sacred liturgy, the holy season of Advent. “Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare us for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.”¹ Joyful expectation, yes– but, preparation...?

The problem for most people lies in the fact that waiting is neither a welcomed nor valued enterprise, but something tolerated at best and more often despised. We crave visual stimulation at an alarming rate. I read recently that the average human attention span has dwindled to 8 seconds– while goldfish clocked in at 9 seconds! When surveyed, 77 % of 18-24 year-olds said that when nothing else is occupying them, the first thing they do is reach for their phones.² Only 10% of Seniors said that! What more evidence do we need?

Educational programming has adjusted accordingly, and so our children are taught from an early age to operate in rapidly paced time segments. What is the effect of all this? It plays upon our tendencies to seek gratification in the here and now, signaling that *waiting* is something to be avoided. As we become overwhelmed by images and stimuli, we are more likely to simply submit, unable to keep up with the flow. We become passive, precisely the mental state advertisers hope to achieve in us, because now we are all theirs!

Once while flying, just as I had nodded off following take off–all of the sudden a loud announcement woke me up. Soon I saw the cart rolling down the aisle selling items. Shopping while flying!

¹ Universal Norms for the Liturgical Year, paragraph #39

² Statistic Brain Research Institute, Seth Harden, Founder and CEO

Truthfully, we have many reasons to dislike waiting in its various manifestations, but we must ask if we have lost something valuable in our ceaseless efforts to streamline our lives?

We have been given precious time to watch and wait, to hope, to remain vigilant. The season of Advent is a vigil. The word “vigil” means to keep watch during normal sleeping hours, to pay attention when others are sleeping. It comes from a root word that means “be lively or active.” So, keeping vigil and being vigilant do *not* signal *passive* waiting, but active and restless waiting, expectant waiting for the Lord, paying attention to the world around us, not being asleep.

It means acting, living out our mission to be God’s agents in the world. Vigilance in the spiritual life is made more difficult precisely because our society anticipates the full joy of Christmas without the necessary preparation. Let us not fall prey too easily to this tendency, even while acknowledging that our expectation grows more pronounced, especially starting on the 3rd Sunday of Advent.

By reminding ourselves of the final coming of Christ, we keep the entire picture before our eyes. The Church gives her collective voice to our waiting through this vitally important yet brief season of Advent. Through the use of Advent Calendars, readings and prayers at home, your families too can mark this sacred time in a most fruitful manner. I encourage you to read one chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel each day during Advent. You’ll finish by Christmas.

God always keeps His promises. So we call on Him to come again. By combining our hope filled expectation with a period of penitential preparation, we will not be caught off guard. Rather, as we pray at Mass each Sunday, echoing the words of St. Paul to Titus, “we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”