

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday Advent Year B

November 30, 2014

Readings: Isaiah 63: 16-17, 19; 64:2-7; 1 Cor. 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

On this Thanksgiving weekend, it is most appropriate, even if coincidental, to encounter a strong theme of thanksgiving in our second reading from Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Here we are told that the grace of God enriches us in every way, "with all discourse and all knowledge." The Italian professor and author Umberto Eco once lamented that today's youth routinely use no more than 800 words in their entire vocabulary, thereby missing the riches inherent in the gift of language.

When his editors suggested that he abbreviate the first hundred pages of one novel which the readers found demanding, he refused, noting that without the initiation, the readers would not be able to penetrate the very spirit of the novel:

Therefore those first hundred pages are like penance or an initiation, and if someone does not like them, so much the worse for him. He can stay at the foot of the hill. Entering a novel is like going on a climb in the mountains: you have to learn the rhythm of respiration, acquire the pace; otherwise you stop right away.<sup>1</sup>

For people who tend to be impatient, Advent is a nightmare. This season of Advent, a word meaning "arrival," is meant to give us the time we need to prepare for what lies ahead and to take a good look at indeed just how well prepared we are right now. Sadly, too many people allow this season to slip by, and we priests are the worst offenders of all. Most do not take the time to reflect, to take stock of their lives and prepare a place in their heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco, "The Name of the Rose," 1983 Postscript, p. 559

Most people loathe waiting because they cannot see any value inherent in doing so. If we are driving and come to a stoplight, we can tend at times to get angry. It never crosses our minds that perhaps someone else is very happy to have a green light going the other direction. Average Americans, I once read, will spend over six months of their lives waiting at a red light- a full six months.

When waiting for something to arrive in the mail, we get very impatient. I am thinking about High School seniors waiting upon acceptance letters to college or others waiting for a package to arrive. Knowing our impatience, the postal service has taken full advantage, offering us next day delivery. In fact, we are given several choices beyond the usual service time, if we are willing to pay the price.

Our Gospel today speaks of being watchful and waiting for when the Lord will come. It ought to be pointed out that St Mark's Gospel, in contrast to Matthew and Luke, was written with the thought that the end of the world was much nearer, and that in fact the calamities had already begun.

St. Mark uses the Greek word "to watch" exactly three times in this brief passage. This is the same word, as well as the same number of times used, as in the scene from the Garden of Gethsemane in which Jesus remarks, "Won't you stay watch with me for even an hour?" Coincidence? Perhaps, but I wonder.

Three times Jesus asks for help during his hour of suffering and each time the disciples are preoccupied. Are we any different? Are we just too busy to get to confession? Are we too frazzled to spend some time with Scripture or to introduce our children to some beautiful Advent customs and traditions? Too often after a long day, we want to sit in front of the Television or the computer to relax, allowing our minds to go into a state of dormancy.

God understands our busy-ness, He sympathizes with our plight. Yet, He will not stop challenging us and he will not stop inviting us to keep watch with Him. Let us not imitate the example of the Israelites at the beginning of the first reading, blaming God for the fact that WE have strayed. God has not gone anywhere- we have! Advent gives us a new beginning, another chance to do something different this year.

We have been given twenty-five days to wait- 600 hours. That is not a lot of time, but it could be very valuable time. May we take this brief season of Advent to heart, and do so beginning today. Make it a time of true spiritual growth and repentance.