



First Sunday of Advent November 30, 2014 B

A New Liturgical Year The Year of Mark — Cycle B

This weekend, we begin a new Liturgical Year.

During each Liturgical Year, Mother Church places before us, her children, extracts from the story of *Israel* (first reading), the story of *Jesus* (Gospel) and the story of the *first Christian communities* (second reading). The challenge for the homilist and for each of us is to connect these stories to the story of our lives.

The two main seasons of the liturgical year are the *Advent/Christmas season* and the *Lenten/Easter season*. The word *Advent* means *coming*. The Church speaks about the threefold coming of Christ, who came in the flesh 2,000 years ago, who comes to us through the sacraments and in our everyday lives, and who will come at the end of time—which is a big theme in Scriptures but which we do not pay much attention to. One reason for this is because the early Christians believed that Christ's Second Coming would happen within their lifetime. Hence, we hear many references to the Second Coming in the New Testament. We, too, believe that Christ's Second Coming could happen anytime. After all, Christ said: "*You do not know the day nor the hour.*" But there are still a few who do not believe that Christ's coming will happen in our lifetime. Christ can of course come at any moment to tell us: "Your time on earth is over, come with me." We should always be ready for this coming.

In today's Gospel, Jesus urges us: "*Be watchful, be alert. You do not know when the time will come*" — the time of his coming for you and me and all of us. Let us now take a look at today's three readings.

First Reading: Is 63:16-17, 19, 64:2-7

During the Advent season, the first reading is nearly always from the Prophet Isaiah. He is the prophet who spoke most often of a future Messiah.

Today's reading takes the form of a prayer of lament. The people Isaiah is speaking to are going through a very bad time. They wonder if God has forgotten about them. The people have just returned from exile in Babylon (a time of darkness when they believed God

had abandoned them). When they return to their homeland, they find it a mess—their homes are in ruins or taken over by foreigners, their land uncared for. The people even blame God for allowing them to wander from his ways and for hardening their hearts: "*Why do you let us wander from your ways, and harden our hearts?*"

In the Old Testament, people believed that God was the *direct* cause of both good and evil. They did not make a distinction—like theologians do today—between the direct will of God and the indirect will (God *allowing* bad things to happen out of respect for human free will). Today, we would say that if our hearts are hardened, it is because we indulge in a pattern of sin, or neglect our relationship with God so much so that we have little or no desire to know or follow God's ways.

Then the author expresses a plea for God to come close to his people as he did in the past: "*O that you would rend the heavens and come down....*"

They want God to heal their shattered lives. The writer then expresses a heartfelt desire for God to see them walking in his ways: "*Would that you might meet us doing right, that we might be mindful of your ways.*"

The people know that they have forsaken God's ways and now they want to come back to him.

Finally, this beautiful image of God as the Potter:

*We are the clay.
You are the Potter.
We are the work of your hands.
"Lord, take us and mold us into your
likeness once more."*

Today's prayer-reading is beautiful for its honesty. It is filled with passion and feeling. Perhaps, all too often, our prayer lacks passion and feeling. We should never hesitate to invite God into the messiness of our lives.

Second Reading: 1Corinthians 1:3-9

Paul opens his letter with a warm greeting. He reminds the Corinthians how they have been blessed with every spiritual gift. During this time, while they await Jesus'

Second Coming, they should live in vigilance, perseverance and uprightness of life, always aware of God's fidelity to them.

Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

Mark encourages his readers to be vigilant as they await Jesus' return. Vigilance is needed because "they do not know" when the Master will return. Jesus is compared to a man who travels abroad and assigns various responsibilities to his employees. They do not know when the master will return. He may come at any of the "four watches of the night: evening, midnight, dawn (when the cock crows), or later in the morning.

ADVENT – A time of waiting, longing and desiring

'Waiting,' 'longing,' and 'desiring' are terms frequently associated with the spirit of Advent. Israel waited, longed and desired for the Messiah to come to them.

Waiting is a big piece of our lives. We wait to feel better when we are sick, we wait for the results of a medical test, we wait for a loved one to call, we wait for reconciliation where there has been hurt, we wait for the phone to ring when we are looking for a job. We wait to meet someone who can be a good friend or marriage partner. We wait in line at the store and in doctors' offices.

Ideally, we should try to make our waiting prayerful: "*Lord, in your time, not my time.*" Easier said than done. But we must try, for our waiting can be holy or unholy. It is holy when we are prayerful and patient. It is unholy when we are impatient and controlling. In all this I am not encouraging passivity. Most likely, we will not make new friends by sitting at home all the time nor will we get a job if we do not send out our resume and make phone calls. But once we have done our part, we could then sit back, wait and trust that whatever is to be will be.

Jay Cormier tells the following story on waiting.

A young wife and her infant daughter can barely contain themselves as they wait. Any moment now her husband's unit will march into the arena after a year in Afghanistan. They've talked every day via Skype, so at least she knew he had made it through another day; he saw images on his laptop of their little Sarah who was born after he left—he has yet to hold his daughter.

The waiting began with the first word that his unit would be called up; the waiting took on new urgency as he made arrangements for the family's care during his absence. Waiting was part of the couple's everyday routine until they made their daily Skype connection—

and if it was late or delayed, the waiting became unbearable. Their waiting became expectation as the day approached when he would come home.

Now, on this day they have been waiting for an eternity, their eyes meet the moment he enters the arena. A few more minutes for the formal dismissal.... Wait, wait, wait. And the long wait melts when husband and father, wife and mother, and beautiful daughter are in each other's arms again.

They go home, happily awaiting the next chapter of their life together as a family.

Such waiting is the reality for many military families. This season of Advent-waiting reminds us that waiting is often the cost of love. In waiting for someone, our own everyday business becomes almost meaningless as we anticipate, worry, and prepare for their return. In waiting, we realize our own powerlessness; we realize our deepest hopes and needs; we realize the gift the person we are awaiting is to us. May our waiting for the coming of the Holy One this Christmas help us understand and carry on the mystery of compassionate and generous waiting in our lives.

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What do we long for?

It is good to also look at what we long for. We may *long* to walk again if we are confined to a wheel chair, to "feel up" again when we are depressed, or too *long* to get over or through a particular loss. We may *long* to connect with a soul friend. Most of all, we should long to be deeply connected with God. Longing is a rich theme in the Scriptures: "*As a deer longs for running streams, so my soul longs for you, my God*" (Ps. 43).

The author of Psalm 63 prays:

*"O God, you are my God, for you I long,
for you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you
like a dry weary land without water.*

St. Augustine, after spending many years drinking from the wells of the world, finally found in God the true object of his longing and thirsting. We must never forget that nothing in this life—even the most intimate relationship—will satisfy the deepest longings of our soul. Why? Because, as St. Augustine says, "*The heart of the human person is made for God. It is restless until it rests in God.*"

This Advent, let us spend time asking God to make our waiting holy and that our deepest longing may be for him.

More practically, this means including the poor in our Christmas budget. Also, may our Advent include participation in our *Communal Penance Service on December 9 at 4:00 & 7:00 pm.*

May our Advent include an invitation to some non-church-goers to come to church. In this area success is inviting. Failure is the failure to invite.

If need be, may this Advent include an effort to reconcile with someone we are alienated from.

May our Advent include the lighting of our Advent wreath, especially if we have children.

An Advent Prayer

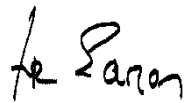
Father in heaven,

***Our hearts desire the warmth of your love
and our minds are searching
for the light of your Word.***

***Increase our longing for Christ our Savior
and give us the strength to grow in love
that the dawn of his coming
may find us rejoicing in his presence
and welcoming the light of his truth.***

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen

Have a blessed Advent Season,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Aaron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.