

Sunday Homily for November 28-9, 2009

First Sunday of Advent, C cycle St. Joseph's, Greenfield Center/St. Paul's, Rock City Falls, NY

1st Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16 [The Lord our justice]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25 [Guide me in your truth and teach me]

2nd Reading: I Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 [May you abound in love for one another and for all]

Gospel: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 [Stay awake, your redemption is at hand]

*♪ Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: keep watch, take heart!
Contemplaré tu vida_en mi. Contemplaré, Señor, tu_amor. ♪*

That's song is from the Taizé community in France. In that community, chants are often sung in several languages, sometimes at the same time.

The English and the Spanish are slightly different. The Spanish means:
I shall contemplate your life in me. I shall contemplate your love, O Lord.

Advent is a time of waiting for the Lord.

This time of year, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, is full of waiting: waiting on line for bargains, waiting in traffic, waiting for the tension of the season to be over and, most difficult for me, waiting for the days to get longer.

Why are we waiting? Our culture doesn't seem to wait for the songs and decorations of Christmas, they are already out there.

Advent invites us to wait so we can get to know the person we are waiting for. Advent is a time to take a step in the direction of a deeper, more just and more loving relationship with God, Jesus and each other.

And waiting is a source of tension. It is often much easier to give up or to jump in with a premature solution. But the tension we feel at *this* season is a reflection of the tension between this world and God's kingdom, a tension we live in throughout our lives. Jesus does not promise to destroy the tension, he sends the Spirit so we can learn to live creative and joyful lives as we tune the tension to the right degree, like tuning a violin or guitar string so it plays the right note and makes beautiful music.

How are we waiting?

Mary waited as an expectant mother. She knew that birth is the end of a process that includes pain and fear. She knew that even when everything seems to be falling apart, Christ will be born, Jesus is Lord .

The First reading and the Psalm teach us to wait like Jeremiah and David waited, like a beloved child, a forgiven sinner, secure in the knowledge that I am loved and that the Lord is my justice and my peace.

The reading from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians shows me how to wait like an attentive lover, "abounding in love for one another and for all". He shows us how to wait like someone who cares.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples to wait without fear and to be filled with hope that they will be saved even when there is trouble and pain and even disaster.

We do not have to eliminate tensions or difficulties or problems in order to live with joy and hope at this season. Advent is a preparation for Christmas. There is both longing and joy. Advent and Christmas are really intermingled, both in the Liturgy of the Church and the rituals of the world.

We wait for Christmas like a child who smells cookies baking. Imagine you are a child and your mother is baking. Imagine you can smell the cookies or the brownies. You can almost taste them before you get to eat them. But it is not yet the right time to finish the process of tasting and eating them. That is what Advent waiting is like.

In the middle of the Lord's Prayer, just before the doxology "For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours," you will hear the words: "*As we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior, Jesus the Christ.*" That is a description of how God wants us to wait.

I remember an experience of that kind of waiting in May, 2008.

Sr. Anna and I were doing a weekend retreat in a parish in Allegany, NY, right next to St. Bonaventure University. The parish community was reaching out to a Mexican family of 9 who were the victims of human trafficking and their employer/oppressor had been arrested. He and his wife were both Mexican.

The whole parish, University and village had come together to sponsor a Sunday afternoon dinner, which the family cooked, with the food provided by the Parish, as a way of raising money so they could return to Mexico, and come back without fear of being arrested.

Sr. Anna and I finished the last morning Mass and had been invited to a concert in town, so we thought we could go to the dinner before we left. The line was around the parish hall, out the door and past the door of the rectory, so we thought we would come back after the concert and eat, since the dinner would last until 8:00 PM.

When we returned around 4:30, the line was just as long, if not longer and it stayed that way until 7:30 in the evening. We decided to wait in the line.

It took us almost two hours to get our food, and I usually hate to wait, especially to eat. What amazed us both was the joy and laughter among the people who were waiting. No one seemed to be upset because they had to wait so long - what surprised me even more, was that I was not annoyed or bothered by having to wait for my supper.

I think it was because everyone knew that this waiting had a purpose - to support our brothers and sisters in need. And the food tasted even better than if we had gotten it in a few minutes. We still talk about that experience. It was truly a time of "waiting in joyful hope."

During this Advent season, we are called to wait in joyful hope. We are invited to see dependence on God and each other as a means to independence from the demands and fears so prevalent in our world and even our Church.

We are called to a *revolutionary* patience in the tension between light and darkness as the Gospel invites us to accept the tension of the present in the hope that Christ will soon come - in our hearts and through us to our world.

Advent is waiting in the darkness for the light to come. It is not waiting for disaster, but *preparing* for the good we are waiting for to arrive.

The Alleluia verse we sang today is truly a song of joyful hope. It is another expression of the call to wait in joyful hope.

*♪ Stay Awake, be ready! You do not know the hour when the Lord is coming.
Stay awake, be ready! The Lord is coming soon! Alleluia, alleluia, the Lord is coming soon. ♪*