

## **1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent, Cycle C**

*Let us pray:*

**O God, teach us how to fill this Advent time with your love.  
With this new church year, may our lives cycle ever closer to yours.  
Heal our hearts and mend what has been broken by sin.  
Jesus, as your followers, may we bring your light and peace  
into the ‘here and now’ of our lives.  
May this green wreath with its bright candles  
help us to prepare for the real Christmas  
which happens in our hearts.**

*To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.*

**Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths.  
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God, my savior.  
For you I wait all the day.  
You are good and upright; you show sinners the way.  
You guide the humble to justice; you teach the humble your ways.  
All your paths are kindness and faithfulness;  
your friendship is with those who revere you.  
*To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.* (Psalm 25)**

**And now, we ask for your blessing, O Holy God:**

**Father of Light, Son of Life, Spirit of Love.  
Fill us and our time together with your presence.  
May you also bless our families and all those in need. Amen.**

*The Gospel – Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36*

**How is this gospel ‘good news’ for you?  
What words from this passage are most meaningful to you at this time?**

*Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said when asked  
about the future coming of Christ:*

**“The future is not in our hands. We have no power over it. We  
can act only today. We, the Missionaries of Charity, have a  
sentence we try to take to heart: ‘We will allow the good God to  
make plans for the future -- for yesterday has gone, tomorrow has  
not yet come and we have only today to make God known, loved,  
served.’ So we do not worry about the future.”**

*What do you think?*

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian and martyr under Hitler, wrote that Advent marks God's coming into our midst. But it is not just a remembering of an historic moment long past – it is being aware and openly prepared for the ongoing and recurring possibility of God coming into our midst here and now – a matter of glad tidings and of preparedness.**

**We need to live “for Christ in the daily grind” (J. Heinrich Arnold, one of the elders of the Bruderhof communities). We need to be proactively and eagerly devoted to overcoming injustice wherever we find it and to help God's ways, God's kingdom, to grow in the reality of our world.**

**“When times seem the worst, God is near. When living seems hopeless, God is close by. When life is at its worst and the world is falling apart, God holds the whole world in loving arms. When we need a fresh start, God is there to offer a clean sweep.” (*Celebrations*, Nov, 2003)**

**From *Exploring the Sunday Readings*, Dec. 2000:**

**Fearful living is *not* faithful living! While these readings may seem unnerving, they are meant to offer us hope – even in the midst of disaster. Jesus assures us that our salvation is at hand. ‘Be not afraid’ is one of the most oft-repeated pieces of advice in the New Testament. With Jesus, we have nothing to fear, even when our boat is rocking in a violent storm.**

**From *Living Liturgy*, 2004:**

**‘Bad luck’ and unhappy endings may haunt our ideas and fears of the future. But with Jesus we do not need superstitions or magic ‘rituals.’ Jesus gives us a blueprint for guaranteeing a future filled with life and happiness – salvation. “Being vigilant” is about being attentive to the presence of God in our lives. We are to “stand erect and raise our heads” – an image of readiness and anticipation. The Lord's coming is about keeping our focus clear *now*: the readiness is the anticipation. We are told to ‘stand before the Son of Man.’ This is an image of such an intimacy with Jesus that he has already come for us – is present to us. This unity and intimacy comes from prayer; it is our source of strength. Such vigilance does involve a type of dying; it is the paschal mystery. Our focus cannot be only on our own wants and needs. We need to unite our desires to the presence of Christ in our lives. We need to pray to recognize Christ in others and to grow in this likeness ourselves. There is a dying and a rising to all of this.**

**From John Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus, Cycle C*:**

**Luke cautions against carousing, drunkenness, and worldly cares. This is directed to the elite of the times. Ordinary peasants (95% of the 1<sup>st</sup> century population) had no time for such things. But beware – when Luke mentions the “rich” or is directing concerns toward the elite, we need to cross out that word and put in “greedy.” This challenging and warning of the greedy is a primary theme of Luke’s gospel (Year C).**

***From Exploring the Sunday Readings, Dec. 2006:***

**During this season of busy-ness and “Jingle-Bell” tunes, let us keep our focus clear. Advent is about the coming of Christ – in the past, in the future, but even more so in the *right-now*. Justice is coming! Love is on its way! Hope has scheduled a rendezvous in your area! Don’t miss it!**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading – Jeremiah 33: 14-16**

**“’Tis the season to be just, not just jolly.”**

**The prophet wrote this at a time of exile and destruction.**

**What is the prophet showing us about God?**

**How does this reading both comfort and challenge us this Advent?**

**How is ‘justice’ different from ‘charity’?**

**Here is a story to illustrate the radical, practical, enduring quality of justice:**

**In a rural mountain village, the only thoroughfare was made treacherous by the presence of an enormous boulder. While the villagers were adept at avoiding it, tourists and other travelers who were unfamiliar with the road frequently crashed into the huge rock. After each accident, the villagers hurried to the aid of the injured, took them into their homes and nursed them back to health. This was charity. After several such accidents, the villagers decided that they would pool their efforts in order to do whatever was necessary to remove the boulder. This is justice, biblical justice. (from *Celebration*, December, 2000)**

**What boulders do you see to remove?**

*2<sup>nd</sup> Reading -- 1 Thessalonians 3: 12 - 4:2*

**This is the oldest New Testament piece of writing, dating from about 50-51 AD. It is the beginning of Christian literature.**

**Paul's preaching and the belief of Jesus caused so much unrest and turmoil in this city that Paul was forced to leave. He later writes this letter to his new community.**

**In the midst of difficult times, what is Paul's message?  
What is the message to us this Advent?**

**From *Celebration*, Nov. 2003:**

**Advent is a season of waiting. Yet, to us waiting is often seen as irritating and a waste of time. Henri Nouwen in an article called, "A Spirituality of Waiting," says we have much to learn from the spiritual ancestors that we find in Luke's Gospel: Zechariah and Elizabeth wait, Anna and Simeon wait, Mary and Joseph wait while being open to the Word of God that they often do not understand. Nouwen says there are certain qualities of their waiting that we need to imitate: they wait with a sense of promise. They trust in the seed growing within; trusting this promise gives them endurance. They wait actively, fully present to each moment -- aware, serving, praying, and watchful. Their waiting was also patient and open-ended – being open to what God could be doing in their very midst, not just rigidly holding on to their hopes and wants.**

*Let us pray:*

**O Lord, you are the ultimate Gift-giver.**

**Help us in this busy season not to miss the coming of Emmanuel  
during both the time of preparation and the feasting itself.**

**Keeps us from blindness to your presence –  
everywhere and in everyone.**

**Protect us from insincerity: May our greetings be truly filled  
with love, friendship, prayer, and fun.**

**Help us to take delight in the marketplace  
now transformed by lights and music – all symbols of your love.**

**Save us from undo anxiety and negativity.**

**Let the child in us all rejoice with wonder, joy, peace, and humor.**

**Amen.**

**"Now is the Time" by Tom Kendzia**