



Things to Ponder

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First Sunday of Advent – Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Dear Parish Family,

We begin this new liturgical year today with these powerful words of the prophet Jeremiah:

“The days are coming, says the Lord...”
(Jeremiah 33, 14)

The prophet's words stir an excitement and, perhaps, a bit of fear. They are meant to shake us up so as to take notice. Like the evangelist, Luke, we are to

“Be vigilant at all times and pray that [we] have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”
(Luke 21, 36)

Advent is not just a season. It is an attitude! Waiting is something with which we are all too familiar and not a reality with which we are very comfortable because waiting requires us to notice the aching in our hearts, the hungers of the world, and the temporary nature of all of creation! Our waiting is based upon a promise:

The days are coming says the Lord when I will fulfill the promise
I made to the house of Israel and Judah
(Jeremiah 33, 14)

This promise is fulfilled in Christ; and many within the earliest Christian communities expected his glorious return within their lifetimes. Thus, Paul urged the people of Thessalonica

“...to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord
Jesus with all his holy ones.”
(1 Thessalonians 3, 13)

The virtue that sustains and empowers our patient waiting is called hope. St. Paul wrote to the people of Rome:

“Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.”
(Romans 8, 24-25)

Hope is based upon a sincere trust in the promise made by one whose word we respect. Hope, however, is not simply wishful thinking; nor does it give one the permission to be lazy. Hope has an urgency that drives the believer to want to make things right. The word for making things right is justice! Consider the exiled people to whom Jeremiah spoke, the expectant Thessalonians, and the people witnessing the destruction of Jerusalem in the days of Luke. Who in our day is crying out for justice?

Poverty and war besiege many in the world. Fear threatens to alienate people from one another. The holydays stir up feelings of anger and depression in many broken families and lonely people. The good deeds that we perform are not just nice things to do at Christmas time; they are acts of justice that are constitutive of what it means to be a Christian. These loving actions are not meant to remove the longing in our hearts, but they give it meaning.

Advent always conjures fond memories of waiting with fond expectation from my childhood. The family would gather around the Advent Wreath. The lights were out and all eyes were focused on the flickering candles. Christmas music played faintly in the background. There was a brief moment of silence in our family of seven children all waiting for dinner. In that moment we knew God's presence! Look at the wreath we are about to light. The circular formation of greenery symbolizes eternity. The candles mark time as we measure it. God has become man in time; God will return in time; God is in our midst now!

"The days are coming, says the Lord ..."

Yours in Emmanuel,

Rev. Bill Foley

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