



During the Advent season the Church always puts before us to ponder three different “comings” of Jesus:

1. Of course, the coming of God among us as a man which we celebrate at Christmas.
2. The coming of Jesus to us now every day through the grace of the Holy Spirit.
3. And Jesus coming again in glory at the end of time.

The advent season is meant by the Church to help us ponder all three of these comings of Jesus together, not just one or another of them necessarily. All three of these comings of Jesus involve patience and hope. Let’s take them one by one.

First we will soon celebrate Christmas where God sent His only Son into the world. The first reading helps us recall a time when humanity was waiting for the Savior. “The days are coming,” says the Lord “when I will fulfill the promise I made to the House of Israel and Judah. In these days, at that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot.” That “just shoot” is Jesus, the Savior promised to the Jews, indeed, to all humanity.

Imagine, though, before Jesus came, what life was like. We are almost spoiled with the tremendous access to God which we enjoy. But before Jesus came it was not so. Humans were mired in sin and error with no access to God for forgiveness and truth. And yet their hearts ached for it. Their hearts longed for God, even if they were not fully aware of what they longed for. The Jews especially longed because God did have a special relationship with them and promised them the Savior. So it was a time of patience, to wait for what God had promised, but also a time of hope, because God would not let them down.

We bask now in the glory of that coming of Jesus as man. He continues to come to us every day now in many splendid ways: sacraments, the Word of God, through each other, and in the persons of the poor. Yet we still must wait on Him even now, because He has plans for us – as individuals, as families, as a parish, as a diocese, as a Church.

Wouldn’t we want Him to just fix everything all at once? To have Him just fix things that we see wrong in our families or in ourselves. “Just do it, God. Fix it now.” But God doesn’t work that way during this time of our earthly life. He doesn’t force His way like a bulldozer. His plan is perfect healing of us and He can draw good even out of the worst evil. So we must wait, continually praying for that which we might know needs to be fixed. We have hope knowing that Jesus will not ever let us down.

Finally, in the Gospel reading for today, Jesus speaks to us of this final coming in glory, a frightful event for those who are not with Him. For those who refuse to give up their sin. This will be the Day of Judgment for all. There will be no escaping it for anyone. Yet, we Christians long for that day. Do we not pray for it in one of the Memorial Acclamations? “Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.” We pray for this Second Coming of Jesus. We want it to happen, not because we want people to be lost, but because when it happens, all will be made perfect in love. On that day, there will be no more wars, or sickness, or violence, or sin. We who are close to the Lord, who are faithful, will be saved forever.

So we wait for that day in patience and in hope, but also in anxiety, lest we not be among the saved because of our evil deeds and our unwillingness to turn from them. That’s why Jesus warns us today: “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.”

So we have this Advent season to wait, to prepare, and to hope. I know that Advent is a busy time for all – buying gifts, preparing for Christmas – and I know that some of this is necessary. But please make all that secondary. Do not get sucked into the spirit of the world. Use this Advent time as a time of more prayer and deeper reflection about God’s love. Make a good Advent confession, turning from your sins and preparing your heart to meet the Lord whenever He may come.

I’ll talk more about that next week. For now, take advantage of this beautiful Advent time that God has given us – to wait in hope and to prepare our hearts to meet Him.

**Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend, Indiana
1st Sunday of Advent, 2009**