

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT , Cycle B

December 4, 2011

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

Marathana! Come, O Christ the Lord.

“We have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind.” The poetic imagery of these words from the lament of the prophet Isaiah is particularly appropriate for us in the northern temperate zone as we make the transition from fall into winter. The glorious spectacle of the colors of deciduous trees signals the inevitable denuding of their branches, leaving them exposed to the ice and snow, to the cold winds of dark winter.

During that winter the signs of life in the flora are hidden. Then predictably the daylight increases, the sun rises higher in the sky, and signs of life spring up even under the snow. That spring will come in three or so months is predictable; that is, barring an apocalyptic event that shakes up the earth on its axis and in its orbit.

What Jesus spoke about in the gospel with his sobering words, “Be watchful! you do not know when the Lord is coming will be far more cataclysmic than that .” The spiritual dimension of our life is more susceptible to radical change of direction than the orderly movement of the planets and galaxies of the universe. The change comes first from God’s grace, God’s love, rending the veil of our blindness that prevents us from seeing God at work in the world. Secondly the possibility of change comes from God giving us the freedom to accept or reject his offer of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ. May his name be blessed forever.

As the liturgical year came to an end yesterday and Advent begins today we hear the message again, in a seamless transition. Jesus alerts us to be ready, like loyal, dependable servants staying up, keeping watch for the return of their master, who may come any time of day or night. The church has been announcing the final coming of the risen Lord for more than two thousand years. He is certainly taking his time, we might be inclined to say.

We heard the prophet Isaiah pleading, even centuries before the incarnation, “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!” Why? Because many of the chosen people had wandered from God’s ways, had hardened their hearts, and lost their fear of God’s wrath for their having broken their covenant commitments. The prophet pleaded for mercy trusting in God’s faithfulness in spite of the people’s unfaithfulness. But when the Son of God comes will he sadly find that charity has grown cold? Will he find faith on earth?

Karl Rahner writes of Advent as a liturgical time when we delve deeper into the interpenetration of the past, present and future times. For the generations that lived from the time of Abraham to John the Baptist, the awesome mighty deeds that God wrought for their well being and deliverances were reassuring evidence that God would fulfill his promise to send them a Messiah. Past experiences of God’s mercy gave the reasons to hope for God’s future blessings.

What reasons do we have to believe that Jesus will come some day, and transform this groaning, often heartless world into a new creation, something beautiful for God?

You know what the main one is, that *kairos* moment in human history, the fullness of time, when the Son of God became the Son of Man. For the generations that live after that earthshaking inbreaking of God into human history, the witness of Jesus' life, death and resurrection gives even more assurance that what God has promised He will bring about. God is faithful, Paul assures the Corinthians. We have hope for the future, and should not be discouraged by the harsh realities of the world we live in. We are no longer slaves to an endless cycle of seasons, the relentless succession of hour after hour, day after day, year after year, with no possibility of growth and change, nothing new under the sun.

Those who accepted and recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the divinely promised Messiah understood that he came to free the chosen people not from political tyranny; "My kingdom is not of this world." He came that they and we and the people of all nations, races, and tongues might be set free from the spiritual tyrannies that can enslave us and do so for many. I mean those deceitful seductions of Satan that sin, disobedience of God, is no big deal, that life is meaningless, that death is utter annihilation, that if there is a God he does not care a hoot about puny you and me.

Not so, the church says. "*Lex orandi, lex credendi.*" The way the church prays is the way she believes. In the opening prayer of this first day of Advent the church prays that Almighty God grant 'the faithful' a resolve to run to meet Christ with righteous deeds. 'Resolve to run' is not exactly the mind of a couch potato just watching and waiting for God to do something. We need to act on the conviction that God wants us to be a partner in bringing about his new creation by a spiritual conspiracy - a conspiracy of love.

The opening prayer continues, giving the reason why we should want to run to meet Christ with our good deeds, namely, that we may be gathered at his right hand and worthy of having a place in his heavenly kingdom. The allusion to being gathered at his right hand reminds us of the final judgment scene described in Matthew's gospel we heard last Sunday, when the Son of Man coming in glory will separate sheep from goats. There we were told plainly the righteous deeds that are the criteria for whether one end up on the right or the left. In doing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy we are ministering to the judge himself, he says. Life here in this broken, wounded world gives us plenty of opportunities to do some of those righteous deeds. We just need to open to them and step out in faith, take the initiative.

Dame Maria Boulding in her book "The Coming of God" offers us another perspective on the appreciation of Advent. She ponders on God's longing for us to come to Him, which is antecedent to our wanting Him to come to us. Our longing is expressed through the prophets like Isaiah and the psalmist's, "O God, ...for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting." God pleads with us through the prophet Hosea speaking sentiments in his name, "Come back to me with all your heart. Don't let fear keep us apart." God reveals His heart's desire to have those made in His image and likeness come to live the Trinitarian life of consuming love. In this mutual longing for loving union, God has taken the steps to meet us more than midway. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not die but may have eternal life."

As we continue with the Mass, offering back to God the gift of the beloved Son, whose passion and death are the only adequate satisfaction for our sins, we bring into the present moments the effects of what God did in the past. In our communion in the body and blood of Jesus, who has provided to be with us always, we begin to share in the promised future heavenly banquet.

Then every tear will be wiped away, every wrong made right, all creation will be subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Son will then hand over his kingdom to the One who is the source

of all being, so that God may be all in all. AMEN.

Fr. Chistopher Wyvill