

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot ; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: "The Lord our justice."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

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, and for you I wait all the day.

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice, and teaches the humble his way.

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

All the paths of the Lord are kindness and constancy toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees. The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear him, and his covenant, for their instruction.

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 3:12—4:2

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians:

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen. Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God —and as you are conducting yourselves— you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

The word of the Lord.

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. "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. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 1st Sunday of Advent Year C

What is the first Sunday of Advent? It is the Church's liturgical New Year's Day. Last week, the Feast of Christ the King, began the final week of the liturgical year. There is a three year cycle of Sunday readings; years A, B, and C. Today we begin year C. In year A, we read, more or less in order each Sunday, the gospel of Matthew. In year B we read from the gospel of Mark and, since the book is short, selections from the gospel of John. This year, C, we will focus on the gospel of Luke. We also have a two year weekly cycle, year I and year II. The gospels are the same each year, but the first readings are cyclic. Today begins year II.

Advent is the season before Christmas. The word has Latin roots; two words in fact, the word "ad," which means "to" and "venire" which means "to come." Literally advent means to come to. There are four Sundays to the season and not necessarily four weeks owing to the fact that Christmas may fall on a Sunday once in eight years. These weeks before Christmas symbolize the time from the fall of Humanity, Adam and Eve's sin until the birth of Jesus; the time humanity waited for and anticipated the promised Messiah.

Traditionally the Church uses these weeks to prepare for Christmas. It is the Feast of the Incarnation when God was born a human being. Jesus, God's eternal Word, had become flesh. We do not prepare for Jesus to be born; that he did, like each of us, only once and can never again be born. Since that happened millennia ago, none of us witnessed the blessed event and never will. For that matter even though each of us was born, none of us witnessed or remember our own birth.

We were not even a glimmer when our parents were born either yet we celebrate birthdays. Christmas is Jesus birthday.

Celebrate has a specific meaning. It does not necessarily mean revelry. We may have or throw a birthday party for celebration, but celebration is not the party. To celebrate means to remember in a special way, for since we weren't real witnesses of these events, we remember them as if we were witnesses. This is also the sense that we celebrate mass together. We remember what Jesus did to save us. It is like we were there in the upper room for dinner, by the fire with Peter, near Jesus cross, peering into his empty tomb, with him in Galilee as he returned to the Father and gathered with the disciples on Pentecost for the Spirit's first visit. The altar around which we gather is multipurpose. It is an altar, Jesus' dining room table, his cross, empty tomb, place of ascension and location for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We cannot relive these events. We remember them instead.

We sing a bunch of songs during Advent; in church, "O Come; O Come Emmanuel" and "Awake; Awake the Night is Flying." On the radio or in the muzak in stores we can hear, "You Better Watch Out ... Santa Claus is Coming..." These can imply that Jesus and Santa will come. As kids we couldn't wait for Christmas and as adults we can't wait for Christmas to be over and done. But that's not what Advent is really about.

Jesus has promised that he will be with us until the end of the age. He has also returned to the Father. He did so he could send the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and inspire his Church, us. He will return at the end of the age to finalize the Kingdom of God as his final triumph over sin and death. The very early Church expected this soon, like yesterday. However, as the years, centuries and now millennia have passed without Jesus' immanent return, we now expect the second coming in a more distant future. Yet, it still can be today. Jesus will also come for each of us. We will all die when Jesus calls our name to enter eternal life. How will we receive eternal life with Jesus? Jesus has told us that, "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (The New Jerusalem Bible John 17:3)

Life, love, family, faith and salvation are among God's gifts to us. We believe; showing we have the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. God has given us these many gifts because God is infinite, eternal and unconditional love. We read in John 3:16 from the above cited bible translation, "For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Normally we believe that there's no such thing as a free lunch, but we can trust God who has given us all these gifts. This is why we call the Gospel the Good News.

“I AM” is the name of God, “YHWH” in Hebrew. The transliteration is YAHWEH in English and JEHOVAH in German (pronounced YEHOWAH). There are no written vowels in Hebrew and the language is written and read right to left; as is Arabic, Farsi and Urdu. God’s name is so holy that it is never spoken aloud. People may read the name silently but will say the word “HASHEM” which is Hebrew for “THE NAME.” In Jewish writing, God may be written as G*d too. YHWH means in English “I AM who AM.” In the gospel of John, that’s the meaning that Jesus used when ever he says, I am. Jesus is fully God and fully Human, having these two, full natures.

Have you ever seen the tapestry icon on the rear wall of the church behind the vigil lights? It represents Jesus as Christ the teacher. In his left hand, balanced on his lap he holds a bible open to John 8:12, which says, “I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark but will have the light of life.” His right hand, the hand of blessing, seems to be shaping the scout’s hand signal. It only looks like it. The “V” is not for victory either. It represents Jesus two, full natures. His thumb, pinky and ring finger touch and the three digits together represent the Holy Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Infant of Prague is depicted using the same hand gesture for blessing. In its left hand it holds a world globe with a cross on the top. This represents God’s Kingdom to come.

Pardon my diversions. I like to give context to content. The birth of Jesus will never again occur. The baby Jesus grew up and died on the cross. The only coming of Jesus will be when we die or when the world ends. We don’t look forward, any time soon, for death or the end of the world; so for what do we wait? Let me invert this. Salvation is not what we do. It’s what God does for us. Jesus is always with us; closer than our beating hearts and nearer to us than anyone else. Jesus waits for us! Each day is an opportunity to be re-born in Jesus. Whenever we draw nearer to him, it is his grace that bonds us together and his life that he shares with us. This may be a better approach to the season of Advent. It celebrates the relationship we already have with God, through Jesus in faith. Christmas is about God coming to us as one like us.

There is a context to the reading from Jeremiah. He was in prison at the time of this revelation. His life was in chaos. He was imprisoned for being faithful to God as God’s prophet. He had a message that was difficult to hear. He promised war, destruction and captivity. Ordinary people feared this. The authorities, governmental and religious, saw this as sedition. The nation was, at the time, attacked and under siege by powerful enemies. The authorities saw Jeremiah as undermining morale and preaching a self-defeating message. The fact that he was God’s prophet and God’s message was the destruction of nation, city, temple,

king and people didn't matter. Everything Jeremiah preached about that took place.

Today's passage is hopeful; hope amid the threat and out of the chaos. About his hopeful message; he was more like Pollyanna. There was no restoration of a Davidic king. Not all the people in Diaspora returned; merely a remnant. The interval between destruction and restoration lasted generations and wasn't brief, as Jeremiah implied. One can say that his hopeful prophesy failed. That is from the Jewish perspective. We Christians have found the truth in it. We hear Jesus as his true meaning. Jesus is the just shoot that is eternal. Our hope is in him.

For whom was this passage originally intended? How did the people then heed it? We don't have a sense of leadership like the ancient Jews. Each Jew was a son (or daughter) of David. They were, by the terms of God's covenant with them, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests to serve God and one another. Was it just one individual to be a just shoot and give witness to our God of Justice? It's not about the Promised Land, Judah, Israel or Jerusalem. The people were God's dwelling place, not the rubble of the temple. God was to build a living temple among and through God's people. Places don't hear the Word of God; people do. Neither can places work for justice.

Given the content of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian, I believe that's the message that people heard from Jeremiah. The Jews of the Diaspora have remained faithful to God and the covenant to this day. God may not have meant for things to be restored to what they were but to be restored for how things are. God is the true king, creator and savior. God still works through, with and in the faithful. We are faithful people too. Sometimes we need to remember.

Paul prayed for God to continue to increase God's gifts to the Church. They were God's faithful. Salvation was theirs. As Jeremiah's message encouraged the Jews of the Diaspora to be faithful, so did Paul's message. The early Church believed that Jesus' return was soon; the fulfillment of God's kingdom, immanent. It became clearer, with time's passage that they were wrong. Paul basically told the Thessalonians to live as if Jesus return is now. God was working through the community to strengthen the bonds between God and one another. They were all in it for the long haul. God's grace is sufficient until Jesus returns.

I have always enjoyed history. Knowing what has happened can help deal with what happens and might happen. As the historian George Santayana has said, more or less, "Those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it." I don't believe that history repeats itself, exactly, but that similar things can happen. When Jesus spoke of the end times, yes, he spoke of the end. But as the end is yet to come, did he speak just of the end of the world? The end has come

for every generation. My parents lived through the great depression and World War II; the one following the other. I was born during the Korean War and since then, the world has not known peace. Today we face a deadly pandemic and some people choose their personal freedom as opposed to choose the common good. People still judge others by the color of their skin and not the content of their character. Bishops make pronouncements strong on discipline but weak on God's love. This makes their righteousness more clang than the gospel. I still drive my car despite global warming. I ask how is redemption at hand? Who can be saved?

Today's gospel could have been written today. Today's world and all our personal behavior are reflected in Jesus' words. Could that be Jesus' point? How does Jesus save the world? One person at a time. Each person, by God's grace and in God's time, receives God's gift of faith. The gospel is not for the world; it's not for other people. The gospel is for you and me to hear. You and I need vigilance and prayer that Jesus day will come. We stand in the face of chaos, violence and tribulation in faith. We face these things as God's children and Jesus siblings. The Holy Spirit leads us. For as we live, God's Kingdom is already here. We live in God's presence. Advent is a time for us to remember; to celebrate Immanuel, God among us.

Can we call God our justice? That depends on what we mean by Justice. If we believe that God must punish sinners, we focus on our way, revenge. Justice for God is salvation and forgiveness of sin. Our way makes Jesus' cross a lie. God's way is love. God's love is limitless. God seeks out sinners to forgive them. You and I are sinners, redeemed, saved and forgiven through God's loving gift of faith. All we need do is remember to be vigilant. We live in faith and won't die of fright. We are freed from sin and not caught in a trap. In Jesus, we shall overcome tribulations.

May the Spirit speak to our hearts; God's Word.

November 27-28, 2021

Fr. James D. Beath