

SPG#114, ADVENT 1C

Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

December 3, 2006 – Fr. Charles Pope

Today we begin that season of waiting and anticipation, Advent. We could say, “Well sure. It is the four weeks of waiting before Christmas.” And it is that. But it is so much more. I find that as I live through Advents in different years that each one is different. It is always different according to what is going on in my life as an individual. It is always different according to the community of faith in which I find myself. And it is always different as to what God is trying to show me about Advent in any particular year.

Whatever year Advent occurs in, I find it always helpful and instructive to review some of the “Advent Ground Rules.” The first ground rule has to do with the nature of Advent. Advent is about anticipation. It is about preparation. It is about being ready. It is about being alert, aware, and watchful. In our culture we must always check our impulse to leap over Advent to Christmas. Because in the contemplation of waiting itself we will learn something new about ourselves and about our Lord. But if we leap ahead we give up that opportunity.

So much of what is written in the New Testament has to do with waiting and anticipation.

Waiting for the Messiah over hundreds of years. John the Baptizer proclaiming the imminent arrival of the Savior. Jesus anticipating over and over again his crucifixion and resurrection.

So, waiting in the Christian life is absolutely crucial. And Advent is our first chance in the Church year to assess our own waiting, our own watchfulness, our own awareness, our own preparation, our own readiness.

What is the significance of hoping, of waiting, of anticipation? What is the significance of a whole church who hopes for peace in the world, who hopes for love among her members? What is the significance of your own hoping? Of your own anticipation?

What difference can hoping make in the face of the way things really are? I perceive that we minimize our own hoping, individually and collectively. A nice Advent exercise, in the face of all the commercialism, might be to spend time daily hoping for the things in your heart that you know are wonderful and loving. In the hoping, then, when we have a handle on that ground rule, the true nature of Advent, then we should find a way to personalize it. That means that each of us allows for the possibility that Advent can have a special personal meaning for each of us as an individual. How you face Advent this year will be unique compared to how we all face Advent.

That means that as you wait this year for the Child it is possible that you will learn something uniquely new about yourself and your hoping, and something new about God.

The third and final ground rule for Advent is that it comes upon us with a largeness and a power that can take your breath away if you are not ready for it. For example, the gospel for today is about signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars. It is about the end of the world as we know it and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God. And so, if we have become somewhat lulled by the season after Pentecost then the season of Advent with its universal images of signs in the universe, the end of the world, the coming in of the Kingdom will startle us, and perhaps even frighten us.

And so I think that there may be a temptation among church members to turn away from Advent, to put it on ice, and wait for the idyllic images of Bethlehem. And so the ground rule is to make

room in your heart for Advent. It will be about huge and frightening things. It requires that we give ourselves to the mystery of God and how he acts in history and in the life of one person.

And so, I ask you, are you ready for this? Do you have a true sense of the real meaning of Advent? Are you ready for it to mean something unique for you? And finally, are you open in heart and mind to accommodate the extraordinary images of Advent?

If your answer to all of these is "yes," or even if it is "I am working on it," then I invite you into a holy and dynamic Advent. I invite you to get ready for God who becomes human. I invite you to know the true meaning of the birth of Jesus Christ. I invite you to hear God speaking uniquely to you in your heart. I invite you to open your life more to the astonishing, the frightening, the loving presence of God.

Herbert O'Driscoll, in his book, A Year of the Lord, invites us to make our lives in Advent into an empty manger, a manger that is being prepared for a Child. That means that in the center of your life, in the part that is most truly you, in the safest and warmest part of you, you are lovingly preparing that place for the Baby.

If you respond to that invitation to make your life into a manger, then you will be ready to hear about mountainous spiritual realities, about signs of the sun and the moon and the stars, about the end of the world and the beginning of the new.

We will be ready to hear, and we will not be terrified. For even in our getting ready to receive him we will know that he is with us.

Even in our preparations, our examination, our questioning he is with us.

Some may ask, "How can God be both anticipated and present at the same time?"

My answer is, I do not know. I think it is a mystery to be accepted. What I do know is that I feel his presence, and yet I anticipate his coming in my heart.

The anticipation and expectation of Advent is not something that is separate from the rest of life. Because in our lives we wonder about many things.

We wonder what it will be like to retire. We wonder about what it will feel like to fall in love. We wonder what it will be like to have a child. We wonder what it will feel like to die. We wonder what it will be like to have enough money to pay all the bills. We wonder what it will be like to graduate from high school or college. Whatever it is that we wonder about, or wait for, or expect, the message of Advent is that God is with us in the waiting. And that he is with us at the end. Luke, in today's gospel goes to great lengths to say this. He in essence says, "Even if we wait in the midst of devastation we will find God waiting with us. And when we are done waiting we will find him there too."

And so one face of Advent has us waiting and anticipating on different levels for many different things, reminding ourselves that God is with us. But another face has us preparing a manger in our hearts, making room for him in our lives.

And so the questions of Advent have to do with both. During Advent 2006 what are you waiting for in your life? What are the anticipations of your life? As you wait, and as you expect, would you make more room for him in your life? If that is the case, then how would you make more room for him? How would your life be different?

Don't be afraid to make this Advent different than all the rest. Don't be afraid to let him in as never before. Let the manger be inside. Amen.