

From The Pastor

Today, the first Sunday of Advent, begins a new year of grace and worship of God in the mystery of our salvation. I pray that this new year of grace will be a time of growth and conversion for each of us. May we find ourselves deepening in faith, inspired with hope, and maturing in love.

The grace of our faith has borne its fruit in your generous response to the food drive for Thanksgiving. Eleven baskets were prepared for our families, which included a fresh turkey, pies, whipped cream, fresh fruit, and a large box of general food items. Thank you to all who shared in this important outreach. Many of you made cash donations this year. We used this money to buy the turkeys, pies, and other perishables at the last minute. I am grateful to Steve Mall and Sue Gordon and those who worked with them in this project. Many hands make light the load. Your generosity has accomplished a great work, which I am sure is greatly appreciated by those who received your blessing. Please say a prayer for these families and for all who are in similar need.

Though the biblical themes remain consistent with images of end times and the coming of the Lord, there is a distinct difference in the mood of the Advent season. Less a mood of fear and dread, Advent calls for an active sense of hopeful anticipation. Advent is the living season of faith that celebrates the fact that Christ has already come to us, yet prepares in joyful hope for his second coming. The trials and tribulations of this world continue, but now we see such tensions in the light of the surpassing work of God's salvation. We are in the event of God action of salvation. As a singular event, beginning with the birth of Jesus, the saving action of God is still in process. The Incarnation of God through Christ was not an exclusive thirty-three year experience. The Incarnation of God in the world continues to this very day in ourselves who carry the presence of Jesus through his Holy Spirit. God is still working out our salvation through us who accept the power and the light of His Son.

This is the already and the not yet of our faith. We tend to wonder what God is waiting for and why God doesn't act more visibly in these kinds of troublesome times. The reality is that God is waiting for us to act in the power he has given us in the person of his Son. In Jesus, we already have all we need to bring about the fullness of the Kingdom of God. As a human family, we simply have not yet chosen to act in this way. We still choose to isolate and defend ourselves in social, political, economic, and cultural tensions that create fear and division. As such, the peace and justice, unity and solidarity that we all seek remains blocked by the reality of sin and injustice rooted in fear and self-preservation. This is evident on the level of governments and nations, but it begins with individual persons in our resistance to accept and tolerate the diversity of all God's people.

These are the themes of Advent that evoke an ardent longing of our hope in Christ Jesus. Advent holds in tension the joy of the birth of Jesus, as we anticipate and long for his second coming. Advent is the active waiting for the promises of God to be fulfilled. What are the promises of God? God promises that a just shoot will sprout from the stump of Jesse and from this will come the Messiah. God promises that divine justice will be revealed and righteousness will be the rule of all. God's promise in Christ is that there will be forgiveness of sins, reconciliation between peoples, and unity for all. This is our hope and our call. In and with Christ, it is you and I who will help bring about this divine action. In Christ, it has already been accomplished. It will be fully realized when all peoples come to share and stand in the vision of God.

This is the meaning and expression of the readings today. God reveals the future coming of all that will be. 'The days are coming says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise.' 'In those days, and at that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot.' Such phrases as these, point to an unknown future time. For us, this time has been fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. The early promise has been accomplished. Now we actively await the fulfillment of the promises of Christ who remains in our midst.

What we await is the day of the Lord's coming. What we may fail to realize is that every day is the day of the Lord. Every day God is coming to us in Christ Jesus, sustaining, healing, forgiving, inspiring, and calling us forth to share in the work of bringing about the Kingdom. This is our joyful hope in all that God has promised to us.

The call of the gospel is to be vigilant, to be ready and prepared at the coming of the Lord. Clearly, painful and traumatic things will happen in the course of our lives. In faith, we can face such days with courage and forbearance, rather than 'die of fright' and give in to despair. This is not to imply that we suffer such things lightly. God knows our pain. God shared and shares our pain in Christ Jesus. God is with us, and will forever remain. It is ours to remain vigilant in faith. We are called to pray with hope and trust, not like poor beggars who really do not expect anything. Pray with expectant hope. Despite our trials, in the end, we will be all in all with God in Christ Jesus. Have a wonderful season. Pay attention, because it will go fast.

Father John Esper