

Year B – 2nd Sunday of Advent – 12/9-10/17

As we enter a little deeper into the Advent Season we realize that most of the world has little awareness of what is happening. The advertisements are just as loud, or louder, as the number of shopping days gets smaller. We are constantly being told what the best thing to buy for someone is, or where the best place to shop is. If you have a smart phone you get numerous messages about where the discounts are the best. What you don't hear much is what the Advent Season is in preparation for.

One thing that does happen as the Advent Season progresses is the number of Christmas themed movies that appear on television. There are many of the classic movies that are televised every year: It's a Wonderful Life, Miracle on 34th Street, A Christmas Story, and A Christmas Carol. And some movies that may not seem classical, but they also appear: National Lampoons Christmas Vacation, Scrooged, and others. Whatever your favorite movie is it is likely that you have seen it several times and could almost repeat the dialogue. Also, seeing the same movie over the years provides a measure of continuity between the past and the present.

Our Advent readings provide the same type of continuity between the past and the present. When we hear the words starting at the beginning of the reading being proclaimed we can almost fill in the ending of the reading. This weeks' Gospel lends itself very much to that feeling, in particular, because the setting and the words are so familiar: a voice crying in the wilderness, make straight his paths, John the Baptist, clothed in camels hair, locusts and wild honey, loosen the thongs of his sandals, and baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Since the Gospel reading does seem very familiar to most of us we can often forget that when Mark was writing the Gospel these were ground breaking words. In John the Baptist there is an Isaiah like prophet calling the people to prepare for the coming of someone who will bring the Holy Spirit to them. At that time the Holy Spirit would have been recognized as God's creating life coming into the world. It was expected that a messiah would be the one to bring about a new heaven and new earth, as proclaimed by Isaiah, but nobody understood how God would accomplish his promise.

At the very beginning of his Gospel Mark tells us who will be sent by God. Mark states he is telling us of the Gospel, the good news, of Jesus Christ the Son of God. To be sure Mark does not say that Jesus is like a son of God, but that he is the Son of God. The rest of his Gospel then proceeds to tell how Jesus is the Son of God. Today we accept the statement without much of a thought, since this is what the Church has believed from the beginning. Imagine hearing the same statement for the first time, particularly just after Jesus had been put to death. Today we have 2,000 years of teaching and witnessing to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, but still many people do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Why does this remain so?

St. Augustine wrote that Christians live in two cities. One is an earthly city. Here we struggle with the daily toils of a human existence: growing up, becoming educated, finding a job to earn a living, and maybe raising a family. When we live in our earthly city we are bombarded with all the advertising that has come to be associated with the days leading up to the celebration of Christmas. The rules of the earthly city are about obtaining and maintaining power over others, and of constantly getting ahead at whatever cost. The earthly city is the one we are born into.

The other city where Christians live is the City of God. This is an eternal city that begins with God and his angels, continues with the Church on earth, and reaches its fullness in eternal life with God in heaven. We enter into the City of God when we are baptized. The two rules of the City of God are love God and love your neighbor as yourself, again very familiar words from the Gospel. In the City of God it is not about getting ahead of everyone else, but making sure that we all reach our destination, eternal life with God in heaven, together.

Our daily survival requires us to be under the rules of the earthly city, but not to be ruled by the earthly city. God provides for us as we persevere in the earthly city and grow in faith in the City of God. In the City of God we live with something that has already happened and something that is yet to come. God has already sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins. This is what we look forward to commemorating with joy during the advent Season. We also have the yet to come: the expectation of the promised second coming of Jesus, coming in glory.

Jesus told us that not to worry about the time of the second coming. We need to lead lives that grow in faith and love. Jesus also told us that he would be with us forever, until the end of the world. This promise is made present every time we come and celebrate Eucharist together. In the Eucharist we can see Jesus, we can touch Jesus and we can become one with Jesus when we take and eat the Body of Jesus and drink his Blood. This seeing of Jesus in the Eucharist is a preparation for celebrating his first coming at Christmas and a foretaste of seeing Jesus in eternal life.