

Advent 2014

The Beginning of the Church's Year of Grace

December 1, 2014

by Fr. Matera

We have marked the first Sunday of Advent, and thus, the beginning of the Church's Year of Grace. Advent is a time of quiet waiting and hoping. With Christians throughout the world we wait for the coming of Christ in the mystery of Christmas. We wait for the coming of Christ at the end of the ages. We wait for God's final word of judgment and salvation.

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of this kind of waiting and hoping in today's first reading when he says to God: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from old." Living at a time when his people had sinned and forsaken God, the Prophet longs for the moment of God's redemption. Living at a moment when God has hidden his face from his people because his people were no longer faithful, the prophet longs for a new day of salvation when God will act anew.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this kind of waiting in the second reading from Mass for the 1st Sunday of Advent. Writing to a small community of Christians in Corinth, Paul reminds them that they are not lacking in any spiritual gift as they wait for the revelation of their Lord Jesus Christ. The Corinthians have already received the gift of the Spirit, but the fullness of salvation has not yet arrived. They are waiting in joyful hope for the final act of God's redemptive plan in Jesus Christ. They are waiting for that moment when Christ will return and bring them in the fullness of resurrection life.

Jesus understood the importance of waiting and being vigilant. This is why he tells his disciples to be watchful, to be alert. Because at the moment they least expect, their salvation will appear. God will act in their lives in a new and surprising way. But if they are not vigilant, if they are not waiting in hope, they will miss the moment of God's salvation in their lives.

God's gift of salvation comes in unexpected and surprising ways. It comes in people and events that we can easily overlook if we are not vigilant. God enters our lives at the moments we least expected: when we are discouraged or disappointed. While we are not always present to God, God is always present to us. But to experience that presence we must be watchful and vigilant. Although he lived in a time when God seemed to have withdrawn, the prophet Isaiah continued to hope that God would act anew. Although Paul lived at a time when there were only a few hundred Christians in Greece, he believed in the power of Christ to renew the entire cosmos.

Advent can be a season of change and transformation, a moment when God acts anew in our lives. But for Advent to be this kind of Season for us we must draw back and listen to God's Word. Take some time this Advent season to prepare yourself for the mystery of Christmas. Set aside time to pray in quiet reflection. Choose a particular book of the Bible (for example the Prophet Isaiah or the Gospel of Mark) and read through it slowly and reflectively. Attend daily

Mass once or twice a week, if you can. Say the rosary. Take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Be vigilant and watchful because God is about to do something new, and if you are not vigilant you will miss it when it occurs.

Father Matera