

Readings

Is 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

1 Cor 1:3-9

Mk 13:33-37

Robert J. Guessetto, O.S.A.
*National Shrine of St. Rita of Cascia
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

A popular religious writer began a reflection on Advent in this curious way: *With each passing year*, he wrote, *I like Christmas less and less*. But he went on, *and with every passing year I like the Feast of the Nativity, Jesus' birth, more and more*. A lot of us probably agree with him. The way we celebrate Christmas seems more and more to drown out the real meaning of season. With hope, another writer said that Advent is an antidote to this craziness. The scripture readings on the Sundays and weekdays of Advent give great reason for hope.

For four weeks we will hear the yearnings of the prophets asking God to return, to come to his people and bring peace. We heard it from Isaiah: *You, Lord are our father and redeemer. Why do you let us wander from you?... Return for the sake of your servants*. Our world situation causes us great pain and anxiety. We worry about our young people in our confused society. We deeply want God to come to us: *Come, Lord Jesus*, we pray. That yearning of the prophets was answered in Christ, and so we relive all the preparations for his coming.

It is good for us to hear again the stories of God who has journeyed with us from the beginning and who in the fullness of time took on flesh and came to walk in the world with us. We need to hear the story again, because often we forget. We forget what Jesus brought us and gave us. We get drowsy and overloaded with the anxieties of life. So in the Gospel Jesus tells us as he told his

listeners: *It is like a man traveling abroad...[who] places his servants in charge...and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.... May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.*

Too often we are like those servants when the master is away. We don't want to let him down. We listen again to the prophecies about the coming of Jesus because they help us remember what is deepest in our heart; what we truly need, what's important. Yet, we don't always keep watch.

Thankfully, Advent creates a period of quiet, almost silence. Advent encourages us to pray in silence and remember that in our heart, given to us at Baptism, is the Holy Spirit. That Spirit helps us recognize the signs of Jesus Christ at work in our lives and in our world. That Spirit also is the gift of God that helps us do good, live as he asks, to be honest, reverence others, be patient with those who are hard to be with, seek a life of peace and **not** judgement, honest hope and **not** negativity.

A few years ago, a book came out with a curious title: *The Lost Art of Walking on Water*. It's a reference to the Gospel where Jesus appears to the apostles when they are on the lake and Peter walks toward Him on the water until he begins to doubt. It's a parable about our *potential* to do great things because of all the gifts God has given each of us.

Walking on water means overcoming the limitations put on us by sin and our fragile humanity. But, first, we have to re-discover how we have been gifted by God in ways that make it possible for us to go beyond our humble expectations. We learn to ask ourselves: *Will this take me closer to my heavenly goal...or further away?*

During Advent our prayer is Come, Lord Jesus. It's like saying: *Help me to relearn the art of walking on water, the art of trusting in your Spirit within me to have the strength again to **be** good and **do** good.*

Something like this took place at one of the funerals a short while ago. The son of a man who died much too young got up for the eulogy and said, *I could tell you stories about my Dad or I could tell you how painful his death was. But I would rather tell you about the mercy of God we experienced in the last months we had with him.* And he did just that and there wasn't a sound in the church. That is walking on water. That is an answer to the prayer, *Come, Lord Jesus.*

St. Paul was talking about this in the second reading: *I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus...as you wait for the revelation of Our Lord Jesus Christ.* We have inside us more than we sometimes know. We are capable of much more than we often imagine. Let us use Advent to learn what's inside and to ask the Lord for help to bring it out and live it so that we are prepared to truly celebrate the feast of His birth.