

Advent I - Cycle C, 12.1.24

Jer 33:14-16/1 Thess 3:12-4:2/

Luke 21:25-28,34-36

On Thanksgiving Day, I attended Eucharist at one of the local Toledo parishes. The music was beautiful, all the familiar hymns of thanksgiving – For the Beauty of the Earth, Let All Things Now Living, For the Fruits of This Creation. The Lector had a clear, resounding voice and proclaimed the Word with conviction. In the Epistle from First Corinthians, however, when he read the lines: *you were enriched in every way... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ* – the words offer a hint of Advent. But instead of **revelation**, he said **REVOLUTION**. He quickly corrected himself... but I wished he hadn't. We do await the revolution of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, that's what Advent is all about. Perhaps you'll sing Canticle of the Turning sometime during Advent:

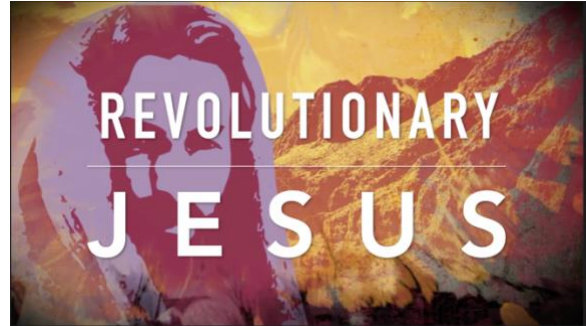
*My heart shall sing of the day you bring;
Let the fires of your justice burn.*

Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near... And the world is about to turn!

Jesus describes that revolution in unsettling terms: *signs in the sun, the moon and the stars... nations in dismay... the roaring of the seas and the wave*. It's a tsunami of radical change.

In her recent essay, *The World Will Change by Creating a New One*, Franciscan Sister Elia Delio, invites us to reconsider the words we use to describe God so that they may more accurately portray the Divine. Sr. Ilia writes: *We need a God revolution, a total and complete theological upgrade, including God's relation to the world, salvation, and the life we hope for. Religious people*

continue to use old language and old paradigms to try to make sense of the world—and it is not working. A God who is increasingly out of touch with the world is a God who is quickly dismissed from the world. Without understanding the meaning of God in relation to the whole, we cannot adequately relate to a God who is for the world in all its messiness.



This Jesus for whom we wait was and is a revolutionary. He reveals to us the unimaginable face of God which, on the first Sunday of Advent, is described as an expansive cosmic sphere. As these four weeks unfold, that face of God, who God is and what God desires of us, will be revealed in the public ministry of Jesus placed squarely on the stage of history, until at last, at Christmas, the revelation of God is seen in the most particular and unimaginable way – in the flesh and blood of a Babe born in Bethlehem. God comes into our world rather than calling us out of it into the realm of the divine. As St. Athanasius wrote in his treatise On the Incarnation, *“The Son of God became human so that humans might become God.”*

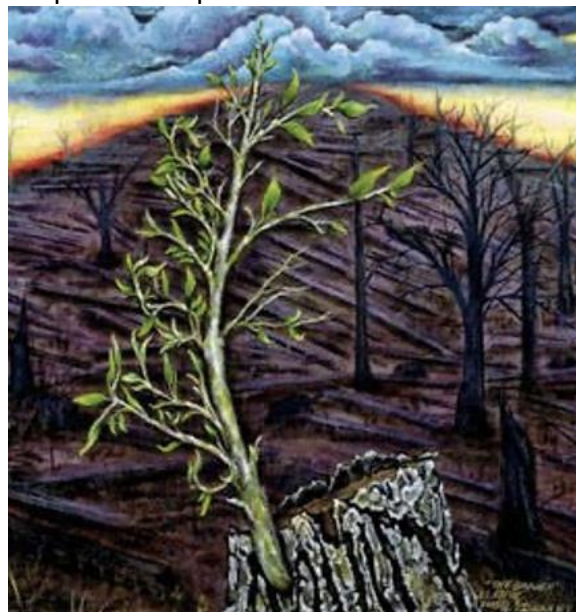
This revolution in our personal lives and in our Church and world will only happen if we open our hearts to the transformation that God's grace can effect in us. I'd recommend a motto for us this Advent Season. I'm sure at one time or another, we've all seen a sign in front of a restaurant: **UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT**. It usually

means that the building was rundown and showing its age; or the food lost its quality because the chef became complacent; or the owners got tired of expending so much energy and moved away. Some changes had to be made if the establishment was to be successful and vibrant again. Our Advent overhaul is only possible if we'll allow our premises, our hearts, to be placed under "new management." That's what our Advent invitation is all about – preparing ourselves for someone who is coming and who, with our cooperation, can take the disasters that we've created in our lives and in our world, situations that seem impossible to be changed or improved, and turn them from failures into success, from darkness into light, from train wrecks on twisted tracks to moving down a road that is smooth and passable. Unfortunately, unlike the restaurant renovations that take place in a few weeks or months, the transformations in our lives don't happen overnight. Ours is the path of slow change, conversions that take time, sometimes a life-time. That's why the message of waiting, which is at the heart of this Advent Season, is crucial to our faith and to our daily living.



First, waiting keeps us looking forward, facing the future. This is the implicit message, and the hope, contained in the Old Testament reading today. Jeremiah tells the Israelites, while they are stuck in a 70-year long wait in Babylon, that God isn't finished with them yet. Even in their seemingly endless exile, even though their

once-proud tree of David's dynasty had been cut down by the Babylonians, God had nurtured a small, frail shoot of new future growth out of that stump. It was a sign of hope that new possibilities lay ahead, growing miraculously out of the cut-off despair of the past.



A small frail baby, born to poor parents in a stable in the backwater village of Bethlehem, didn't seem like grand entrance for God to make into the world. But God seldom shouts. Mostly God whispers. Because hope isn't born out of loud displays, but from quiet signs of possibility, held close to the heart. And the incubator of hushed expectation is waiting. It can't be microwaved or hurried. Waiting gives us the opportunity to slow down, turn down the inner noise, and pay attention to small things—like shoots of new growth, a Christmas cactus slowly blooming or a baby's cooing. We are hard-wired for hope, made by God to lean into the future with faith and trust, believing that the best is always yet to be, secured by the God who beckons us forward.

Second, if we had nothing to look forward to, our lives would lose their discipline and purpose. Hard to believe, but it's true that waiting and hoping keep us on our toes, keep us alert to new possibilities, and keep us on a journey toward a destination. Without such hope, cut off from a sense of the future, our existence would spiral down in despair, or be wasted in sloppy living. The New Testament readings, from both the epistle and the Gospel, underline this truth. Waiting is good for us. It keeps us pointed ahead. Waiting keeps us from becoming trapped in the past or the present. We endure the frustrations and inconveniences life brings us because we know that something wonderful awaits us.

To be fully alive, to become fully the person God created you to be, you and I have to cherish a sense of expectation. It's this hope that keeps us from giving up when the present moment is dark. It's this hope that will strengthen us as we face the ongoing challenges of our political and civic life in the weeks and months ahead. It's this hope that frees us from the tyranny of our past, and opens us to the limitless possibilities of God's continued "yes."

In his timeless book, *With Open Hands*, Henri Nouwen describes what this hope looks like. He wrote: *You are Christian only so long as you look forward to a new world, so long as you pose critical questions to the society you live in, so long as you emphasize the need of conversion both for yourself and for the world, so long as you stay unsatisfied with the status quo and keep saying that a new world is yet to come. You are a Christian only when you believe that you have a role to play in the realization of this new kingdom, and when you urge everyone you meet with a holy unrest to make haste so that the*

promise might soon be fulfilled. So long as you live as a Christian you keep looking for a new order, a new structure, a new life.

May our Advent days of anticipation be filled with the hope that brings us peace of mind and heart, and a desire to bring that hope into the lives of others.



John Kasper, o.s.b.