

Reflection, December 4, 2024

First week of Advent.

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These readings lift me up! The readings are a field of energy inviting us wholeheartedly into this new moment of Advent. And aren't we sorely in need of it?

Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus, Come is the cry of Advent. It's a cry of *expectation*. During these weeks of Advent, we hear Isaiah. This Isaiah speaks of *all* that the Lord of Hosts will do in the future, and it is beyond imagination, amazing: the rich food and choice wines, God will destroy the veil, the web, even death. How thrilling to hear this "good news!"

There is an intense desire for the Messiah. "On that day" is repeated often during this season. "On that Day, it will be said: "*Behold* our God, to whom we looked to save us. This is the Lord for whom we *looked*, let us rejoice..." This promise is a source of strength and hope for a people in harsh times. A light that shines in the darkness.

Listening to our Psalm and Gospel for today, notice they are all in *present* tense. Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd, You guide me, You spread a table, you anoint my head" And in the Gospel, that shepherd *fulfills* the dream and great hope expressed by Isaiah. One writer reflects: "(Jesus) overcame death when he cured "the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others... The crowds were amazed..." He laid out a magnificent banquet, multiplying the loaves and fishes for common people who had followed him into the wilderness. He asked them no questions about their religious affiliation or ceremonial purity. . .in this passage, (against common practice,) foreigners are called to be part of Israel. He acted out of compassion. "My heart is moved with pity.... They *all* ate and were satisfied."

Satisfied? What a mild word for those who had just experienced something they never dreamed of: to be fed, first by the Word of God, and then given loaves by the Bread of Life. They ought to be *dancing*! And maybe some were.

The ones who saw rejoiced and said, "This is the Lord for whom we looked."

Our song today joins in:

O come Divine Messiah. The world in silence awaits the day
when hope shall sing its triumph, and sadness flee away.

For us, this is not the naivete of children giddy for the toys under the tree,
nor the superficial cheeriness of “Happy Holidays.”

No, Advent asks us to go deep into the sources of our peace, comfort, and joy.
We know that the joy of celebrations like Thanksgiving and Christmas,
depend on the people with whom we share it.

The meal is to bring people of “every race and nation” together.

It is meant to facilitate the sharing of love and life with one another.

This Advent, we too cry out in expectation. Our desire, however,
goes way beyond seasonal gift giving, it is the *desire for God*.

We know the Nativity has already happened. We know the Messiah has come.
Still, theologians remind us, the reign of God is “already,” but also, “not yet.”

Around us we see so much war, hatred, and suffering. Even in our own lives we
see the same lack of good. . . a narrowness, a desire for kindness or patience, but
held back by a fear to *look* to Jesus for direction and nourishment.

On the spiritual level we feel incomplete, ever on the way, seeking something
more. It is the *desire for God* to come into our life in a fuller, more genuine way.
But that desire must be matched by our own *active seeking* of God.

This year the season is only a bit over three weeks.

So Advent encourages us to let our *inner* hopes and desires lead us.

We can *step out* from the context of our normal life, our comfort zone.

Maybe start dancing-until we *dare* to hope and believe, that things can change-
certainly when people work together for the common good. Dance- until we *risk*
trusting another’s hidden goodness and so speak from the heart.

We can *choose* to make *full use* of this time for
Looking. Noticing. Hoping. Seeking. Finding.

“This is the One for whom we looked,”
Emmanuel, born in our midst ...*now*.