

First Sunday of Advent

A woman was in the mall doing her Christmas shopping. She was tired of walking through every aisle of every store to find just the right present. She was stressed out by the mounting debt on her credit card. She was tired of fighting the crowds and standing in lines at the registers. Her hands were full and when the elevator door opened, it was full. "Great!" she muttered and the occupants of the elevator, feeling her pain, graciously tightened ranks to allow a small space for her and her load. As the doors closed, she blurted out, "I think whoever came up with this Christmas junk ought to be found, strung up, and shot!" A few others shook their heads or grunted in agreement. Then, from somewhere in the back of the elevator came a single voice that said, "Don't worry. They already crucified Him."

Dear Friends,

This weekend we start the new liturgical year. We have been following 'Year B' for Sunday readings and solemnities and we will follow Year C for the whole year. It is a new year for the liturgy. Any new year asks us to look at the past and hope for the future. In every field we try to remember the lessons we learned and bring hope to be good in the new year. In the same way, the liturgy and the readings today invite us to be patient and hope for the best as we light the advent wreath candle.

Carlo Carretto, the renowned spiritual writer, spent many years living alone as a hermit in the Sahara Desert. He wrote a number of books from that place of solitude, including one entitled, *Letters from the Desert*. In that book, he has a message for those of us who live busy lives in the world. "What is God trying to say to us in our busy lives?" He suggests this: Be patient! Learn to wait—for each other, for love, for happiness, for God! Learn to wait! That's not something we do easily and many of our problems flow from that. We often don't wait properly for things.

Advent means waiting. Waiting for the light of Christ. This is the time of preparation for the celebration of Christ coming to us. All the readings tell us the message of waiting with hope.

In the first reading, prophet Jeremiah has a message of hope for all who await the coming reign of God, which will be manifested in the birth of a messiah from the line of David. This was the time of darkness in Judah's history due to the siege of Jerusalem by Babylon. All the people of Judah lost hope and they were in darkness. Jeremiah gives them hope by telling God will raise up a shoot for David.

In the second reading, St Paul wrote the Thessalonians community to have hope and lead a life in holiness and blamelessness. They were all expecting the immediate coming of Jesus' second coming. It was getting delayed. So, they lost hope. Paul encouraged them to hope for the coming and asks that they love one another so that they might strengthen each other and be ready to present themselves as pure and holy before God.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks us to be ready and be vigilant always. One thing that we need to understand is when the Gospel writers started to put together the Gospel, they have seen the downfall of Jerusalem City and the temple. With that in mind, the Gospel writers give us the hope of the new reign by Jesus Christ.

So let us prepare ourselves to love, and be holy and blameless, and hope to bring joy in all our hearts.