

First Sunday of Advent

Every time a little boy went to a playmate's house, he found the friend's grandmother deeply engrossed in her Bible. Finally, his curiosity got the better of him.

"Why do you suppose your grandmother reads the Bible so much?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," said his friend, "but I think she's cramming for her finals."

Dear Friends,

This weekend, we start the new liturgical year. Advent means coming. Carlo Carretto, an Italian Religious, 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.

Annie Dillard shares this story about proper waiting: She had been watching a butterfly emerge from its cocoon and was fascinated by the process until she grew impatient with how long it was taking and, to speed things up, took a candle and heated the cocoon, albeit very gently.

The experiment worked, but it was a mistake in the long run. The butterfly emerged more quickly; however, because adding heat violated something within the natural process, the butterfly was born with wings too weak to fly. Haste and prematurity had stunted and deformed a natural process. Some things can't be rushed.

The readings today teach us to wait for things and be prepared for God's coming. In the first reading, prophet Isaiah calls the people back to their land after the Babylonian exile. This will bring them back to God whom they have been patiently waiting for.

The second reading asks us to awake from sleep, and conduct ourselves properly. St. Paul calls us to be prepared for the coming of the son of man. Paul believes that Jesus' Second Coming will be a day of salvation only for those who are already acting in a proper manner. We, too, must act as pilgrims, entering wholeheartedly into our yearly pilgrimage through salvation history, leaving behind whatever might hinder our progress, and accepting whatever hardships our journey might entail.

In the Gospel, Jesus warns people from the scripture about their unpreparedness and its results. God calls us periodically for repentance. Jesus quotes two of those incidents that happened in the Old Testament scripture.

What would be our preparations for this advent? What am I waiting for? What are we waiting for together? As Pope Benedict stated, "In the time before Jesus' birth the expectation of Messiah was very strong in Israel, - that is the expectation of an anointed one, a descendant king of David who would at last set the people free from every form of moral and political slavery and find the kingdom of God."

What is our expectation of messiah today? Mary, after listening to the message of the angel waited for the messiah. Joseph, after his dream waited for the messiah. Simion the prophet waited for the messiah. Anna, the prophetess waited for the messiah. These people lived with new spirit to see the messiah with their own eyes.

We come to the Eucharist to see the expectant messiah in our own eyes. Does it happen in the Eucharist? How do we prepare ourselves to meet him?