

Come Lord Jesus!

1 Advent B

"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down" Isaiah 64:1

The last verse of Mark's gospel reminds me of my tendency to fall asleep while watching a movie at home. I've been known to fall asleep even in movie theaters. The holidays can get exhausting and stressful and when the body shuts down, there is not much to stop it. How does one stay fresh for those important times like the arrival of someone special?

Jesus is coming to your home. Jesus came to this world and then into the hearts of men. Jesus is coming a second time and the world will know it in an even more visible way. So we get ready, watch and wait. Jesus is coming!

Advent, originally a Latin word (*advenio*) meaning "come" is a time for anticipating, waiting, hoping, watching, preparing for God's advent in Christ. I look at this season as a dress rehearsal for the second coming. I find it hard to imagine not celebrating Advent each year, if only for the opportunity to act out its meaning. Advent helps us relive the expectation and the longing for a loving God to live among us. Yes, it is a time for awaiting the birth of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. It is also a time for rediscovering the truth that God is with us and we look forward to His coming again.

Advent bids us to "come" and rediscover what God has done and what God is doing. What about the future? It is natural for our thoughts to go back to the gospel verse... "But about that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." I admit it is more fun to think about possibilities than realities. All we can know in the Christian faith is that with God, there is a future. With God, there is a future (repeat). Now I know you are awake. We cannot know the future, but we know there is a future with God. Unfortunately, this has not kept people from wanting to predict what lies ahead for the human race. There is so much speculation based on honest attempts to make scriptures fit a particular human interpretation.

After 14 years of studying the Bible, William Miller became convinced that Christ would return in 1843. When Miller announced April 3 as the day, some disciples went to the mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others were in graveyards, planning to ascend in reunion with their departed loved ones. Philadelphia society ladies clustered together outside town to avoid entering God's kingdom amid the common herd. When April 4 dawned as usual, the Millerites were disillusioned, but they took heart. Their leader had predicted a range of dates for Christ's return. They still had until March 21, 1844. The devout continued to make ready, but again they were disappointed. A third date—October 22, 1844 — was set, but it also passed. —*Today in the Word* (Dec. 20, 1991).

The people were disheartened, and some lost their faith completely. Many since Miller's day have tried to foretell the future of Christ's coming. I tell you that based on

our gospel: no one knows, not even Jesus, our Lord. Yet we can be sure of one thing; Jesus came once and Jesus is coming again. To want more than that is to invite needless speculation and distraction from what begs our attention.

Jesus' coming is an invitation for us to prepare for Him. The early church had an expectation that seems to have disappeared for many. Has the church given up on waiting for Christ to come again? How long will it take Lord? We can safely surmise that if the early church believed in His coming in their generation, that our generation would think the same is true. And so they, like us, hung onto their faith against the realities that were as brutal in their day as they are in ours. The greatest challenge facing them then, was the same as it is for us today; to keep trusting, keep working for good, and keep preparing for the coming of Christ.

As I said earlier, by faith we can know for sure that Christ came and that Christ is coming. It is helpful to our faith if we look at both events as bookends as one in the same event that must be completed for the end of the story. Anglican priest and poet, John Donne once wrote, "The whole life of Christ was a continual Passion; others die martyrs but Christ was born a martyr. He found a Golgotha, where he was crucified, even in Bethlehem, where he was born; for to his tenderness then the straws were almost as sharp as the thorns after and the manger as uneasy at first as the cross at last. His birth and his death were but one continual act, and his Christmas Day and his Good Friday are but the evening and morning of the same day. —John Donne, source unknown.

Looking at God's work in history as one event enables us to proclaim with certainty the words of Holy Communion:

"Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." In the long period of waiting, sometimes in darkness, the experience of His presence spurs us on to keep looking so that our faith might become sight.

In the first lesson, God's people long for Him to come in all his might and fury while acknowledging they have lived in stubborn rebellion of his laws. Yet they have hope that they can be reborn and reshaped as in the example of a loving potter who molds his clay. Long ago people waited for God's intervention. Our loving God is a potter asking you and me to be patient, give Him our inner clay that we too might be shaped and conformed to His image. God is working still and putting on His finishing touches. His workshop is dedicated to making vessels able to hold all that the Holy Spirit desires for us.

Jesus is coming. Our response depends on our reception of Him as we would a guest. Like the famous painting where Jesus is standing outside the door of a home, the owner must open the door before Jesus can come in. Are we prepared to receive Him into our lives? Are we ready to open the door and entertain Him who became one of us?

The Advent mystery of God with us is contained in the story of Jesus' birth. It is the way He planned to fulfill our longing and our hope. Jesus' first coming is the joy of being formed like potter's clay, taking our humanity, our poverty, our limitations and

then filling us with Himself. God in the flesh is the beginning of hope for the future.
AMEN!