

Actively waiting for God

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Nov. 30, 2013 Spiritual Reflections

Through the centuries, Christians have regarded Advent as the season of the liturgical year when the praying assembly remembers and celebrates the first coming of Jesus while preparing to welcome his second appearance in glory. Advent has its own vocabulary. Words like *waiting*, *anticipation* and *hope* punctuate both prayers and preaching. Light and darkness are juxtaposed as the symbols of Advent. Believers celebrate the light of the world whose presence dispels every darkness. We light candles to remember that he who is light has charged us with the responsibility of being light for others. Advent has its own special songs that implore the Messiah to come and encourage those who await him to wake from sleep and remain alert, ready to welcome him at a moment's notice.



Although we continue to celebrate Advent as a season, it is considerably more than that. Advent is a way of life, lived in watchfulness for the God who comes -- not just at Christmas, but every day, in myriad ways and in many wonderful and sometimes distressing disguises. Therefore we wait -- not passively, twiddling our thumbs, but actively.

Isaiah 2:1-5
Psalm 122
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:37-44

Since we await the Prince of Peace, we are advised by Isaiah (first reading) to work toward peace by turning implements of war into tools with which to till the soil. If we were to take Isaiah at his word, how might the lot of humankind be improved! Many think that wars will cease when the Messiah appears, but Isaiah tells us that the cessation of all wars and violence is the means by which we prepare for his Advent.

Paul, in today's second reading from his letter to the Romans, also invites us to wait and prepare actively to welcome the Lord. Throw off the darkness of lust, rivalry and jealousy, urges Paul. His words and his witness encourage all who will hear him to leave behind selfishness, greed and indifference toward the needs of others and work toward bringing light into lives so much in need of our caring and service.

In the Gospel, Matthew sharpens our awareness that if we live our daily lives actively waiting for the Lord, we will not be caught off-guard when Jesus does make an appearance. Matthew also affirms that the final judgment that will take place when the Son of Man appears will be decisive and will bring to light distinctions among people that had been hidden until then. Two men in the field, one will be taken, one will be left. Two women

grinding, one will be taken, one will be left. Such a stark image is not meant to frighten us, but to remind us yet again that we need to be prepared for the Lord.

Henri Nouwen has suggested that the secret of actively waiting is believing that what we await is already on its way ("The Spirituality of Waiting," *The Weavings Reader*, edited by John S. Mogabgab, Upper Room Books, 1993). Those who wait actively have faith that the seed of the future has been planted and that growth is already begun. Active waiting means to be fully present to the moment, fully convinced that the present moment is *the* moment.

Nouwen also suggested that in our waiting for God's myriad comings into our lives, we should let go of our wishes: "I wish I had a better job"; "I wish the pain would go away"; "I wish the weather was better." Because we are full of wishes, our waiting may become entangled in those wishes. Perhaps it is better to let go of our wishes and start hoping. It was only when I was willing to let go of my wishes, said Nouwen, that something really new, something beyond my own expectations could happen to me.

While wishes are limited to specific moments, hope is trust that is open-minded. Hope is willing to give up control over our future so that God is free to define our life. Mary had such hope, as did Jesus. Both were willing to wait actively and hope that what God had begun in them would be fully realized. This Advent, Mary, Jesus and so many who have gone before us encourage our active hope in the God who constantly arrives.

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