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# Look forward to the coming of Jesus

Thomas Gumbleton | Dec. 8, 2011 The Peace Pulpit

In order to listen deeply to the lessons today, it's important to remind ourselves once more that we have begun the season of Advent. The word Advent, as you know, means, "coming." So we're celebrating a season in which we're expecting someone or something to come into our lives. Of course, the someone is God who comes into our lives. In this season of Advent, we expect God to come in different ways.
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One is at the end of time, when it's as Jesus as told us: "God will, in the person of Jesus, return." But then God also comes -- and this is what we usually think of first of all when we think of Advent -- into our human history, Jesus being born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. We are preparing for celebrating that coming once more. Then also, there is the coming of Jesus into our lives at any moment. God is always with us.

| Second Sunday of Advent |
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| Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11 |
| Psalm 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14 |
| 2 Peter 3:8-14 |
| Mark 1:1-8 |
| Full text of the readings [1] |

As we heard last Sunday Jesus proclaiming, "Be alert. Be ready because you never know the day or the moment for these comings of God into our lives." Our second lesson today speaks especially about that final coming, when Jesus will return. I think for most of us, that's something that we don't especially look forward to because we think of it as the final judgment, that moment when there will be a final decision, heaven or hell, but that's not the way that the first Christians were looking forward to this coming of Jesus.

That's why, in our second lesson today, Peter is trying to reassure them. They were looking for the coming of Jesus with great anticipation, with great joy. They wanted it to happen right now and they thought it was going to. Why? Because for them, that coming of Jesus meant what Jesus had promised: the fullness of God's reign, the time when all of creation and all of human life, every person and all of creation would be under the dynamic rule of God's love. There would be fullness of life and joy and peace for everyone. When the fullness of time comes and God returns, the Kingdom of God comes to its completion.

So they were looking forward to that with anticipation and joy, and Peter has to calm them down. He says to them, "Do not forget, beloved, that with God one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." God's time -- there is no time in eternity, but if we think of it -- God's time is not like ours. A thousand days is like one day or a thousand years is like one day. There is no time, so we all have to be patient, but be ready. Be alert.

In the meantime, keep on joining with Jesus to bring about that fullness of God's reign. Now we also can be very confident about this coming of God at the end of time, or at any moment into our lives, not as something fearsome, something to be dreaded, because of what Isaiah has reminded us of so beautifully in our first lesson. "Be comforted my people. Be strengthened," says your God. "Go up onto the high mountain, messenger of Zion. Lift up your voice with strength because God comes like a shepherd who tends His sheep with love. God gathers the lambs in God's arms, carries them in God's bosom, gently leading those who are with young."

See, our God is a God of love, a God who brings comfort and consolation in the midst of our sufferings, trials

and tribulations. God is always a God who comforts at many moments in our lives, but God is this God of love who will bring us into the fullness of God's Kingdom at the end of time. So there's nothing to be fearful of, nothing to be worried about, but something to anticipate with joy, and that's why this season of Advent is a season of joy and hope.

Then also, it's a time when, if we are -- as Jesus encourages us -- alert and ready, we will experience the coming of Jesus into our life at any moment. Jesus told us, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, I am in their midst. I am right there with them." Two or three, that's all it takes to come together in God's name and Jesus is with them. Now, think about that, especially as we anticipate the changes in the diocese.

So often it seems as if what is happening means that small parishes can't exist any more, and I think that will be such a loss because I think I've been in every parish in this diocese at some time or other over the years that I've been a bishop. I must tell you that it's in the small parishes where I most of all experience the presence of God, because in a small parish, people do gather together and they know one another.

They care about one another. There is a bond of love based on common faith that makes them very close, so you really experience the presence of God in a small community, and yet the diocesan officials talk about the demographics. People have moved so now we have to let go of the churches that are too small so we can take care of the big churches where everybody becomes anonymous. What a tragedy. Jesus is present wherever two or three are gathered in his name, and in a small community, that presence of Jesus is very real.

I sense it here. I sense it in any small community where I go. The faith of the people is alive. They come together because they do believe. They want to be there and they care about one another, and Jesus is in their midst. I hope you don't lose that as we follow the demographics as the people say. I hope you don't lose the fact that God is really present in every small community, that we find a way to give leadership to those communities so they don't have to die.

God is present and God can keep them vibrant and alive. This, then, is what we reflect on as we begin this second week of Advent, the coming of Jesus into our lives. We anticipate that final coming when God will bring to fullness God's reign, and all of creation will be blessed and brought into a fullness. Every human being will be living a full human life of joy and peace.

We also look forward to the coming of Jesus on Christmas. We're alert to the fact that this is God's love becoming part of our human history, and then we especially look forward at any moment to God entering into my life right now. I have to be alert and ready to respond in order to experience what Isaiah promised, "Be comforted, my people. Be consoled. Be filled with joy and deep peace."

[Homily given at St. Hilary, Redford, Mich., on Dec. 4. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted. Send this homily **to a friend** [3].]

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