

[Spirituality](#)



A Rohingya refugee boy sleeps after arriving Sept. 14 at a makeshift refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. (CNS/Reuters/Danish Siddiqui)



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This Gospel, at the beginning of the Advent season, reminds us about that final coming of Jesus, which is one of the comings of Jesus that we reflect on and pray about during the season of Advent. But Advent also reminds us about the coming of Jesus into human history. Over 2,000 years ago, the coming of Jesus as one of us, Son of God, but comes into our human history as Son of Mary, a brother and sister to all in the human family, a brother to all of us in the human family.

First Sunday of Advent

Isiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

Psalms 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

[Full text of the readings](#)

But then during this season of Advent, we also remember the words from last Sunday's Gospel, "When I was hungry, you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink. When I was naked, you clothed me," and so on. Jesus comes into our lives in the poor, the suffering, the homeless, the refugee, the exile, the prisoner, and the person who is sick. These are the ways that Jesus comes into our life. During this season of Advent, it's important that we try to do as Jesus says in the Gospel, "Stay awake! Be alert!"

If we do this during these four weeks of Advent through our prayer and our reflection, when it comes time to celebrate the feast of Christmas, when Jesus first came into human history, and we commemorate that, think about that, reflect on that, rejoice in that, it will mean so much more to us if we have thought about this prayerfully what it means that Jesus becomes part of our human history.

Perhaps it will be helpful for us if we reflect on the beginning of the Gospel of John where John starts his Gospel not speaking about the historical Jesus, but starts in the beginning when there was nothing. "In the beginning," John says, "was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." John is talking about the second person of the Trinity. "All things were made through him; without him nothing came to be. Whatever has come to be found life in him, life which for human beings was also light, light that shines in darkness, light that darkness cannot overcome."

John further on says, "And this Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of God, the fullness of truth and loving kindness." In the culture in which we live during these four weeks before Christmas, it will be difficult to be mindful of what we are preparing to celebrate because we are so taken up with the culture of consumption that is all around us. It has in so many ways, it seems to me, become distorted. Every one of us is bombarded with messages about buying, about accumulating more, finding bargains. It's with us all the time.

So it becomes difficult to separate ourselves from that because all of our senses — our hearing, our sight, our mind — everything is filled up with this idea of material goods and that Christmas is all about that. It isn't. It's about the gift that is beyond all gifts, the gift of the Son of God becoming part of our human family. In the first letter of St. Paul to the church at Philippi, Paul gives us a bit of a sense of what this means.

Speaking about Jesus he says, "Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but he emptied himself, taking on our human nature, becoming one of us, entering into the human family, even giving himself over to death, and even the ignominious death of the cross. That is why God exalted him and gave him the name which outshines all names, so that at the name of Jesus all knees should bend in heaven, on Earth and among the dead, and all tongues proclaim that Christ Jesus is the Lord."

We need to get the sense of who Jesus is — Son of God, Son of Mary — and that Jesus has entered into our human history to show us the way to live so that we are able to become the full human persons God wants us to be; and we can share in the work of Jesus to transform our world into the reign of God where peace and justice

and fullness of life is for everyone. It will take real effort for us to spend time during these four weeks of Advent in prayer and reflection to try to focus on what this mystery is that we will celebrate on Christmas — the coming of the Son of God into human history.

But then also during this time of Advent, we can be mindful and must be mindful of how Jesus is present to us because he lives within each of us; we have become sisters and brothers of Jesus. Jesus is present in every member of the human family made in the image and likeness of God. As we know from the Gospel, Jesus is especially present in the poor, the outcast, those who suffer, those who are homeless, those who are refugees. We must try to find Jesus in this way, too, during this season of Advent in our brothers and sisters who cry out to us from their misery and their need.

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Isn't that what Pope Francis was doing this past week when he went to the country of Myanmar and he spoke to the leaders? Some have criticized him for not speaking out more bluntly and using the word that they don't want to hear in that country about the people who are being driven out, the Rohingya. Pope Francis did not use that word publically. It would have done nothing to make life any better for those who are being persecuted.

You must know what is happening there. This whole group of people — hundreds of thousands — their villages have been burned up. People are tortured, killed, murdered and driven out. They're fleeing into the country of Bangladesh. Francis, by going, has made their plight known to all the world. But also he has gone into those refugee camps. He went into Bangladesh to be with the people who have been driven out because he knows that each one of them is Jesus. When he reaches out to them offering them support, comfort, understanding, love, he is doing this to Jesus because Jesus lives in these people.

We can't go to Bangladesh, of course, but there are people like this around us. We can try to reach out to them, understanding if we're alert, that we are reaching out to Jesus and that we are helping to bring about the reign of God by bringing the love of Jesus into the lives of people who are being persecuted, tortured, killed. And as we do this we will find that what St. Paul said to the church in Corinth in our second

lesson today becomes true for us.

Paul says, "Receive grace and peace from God and from Christ Jesus our Lord." Then he goes on to thank the Corinthians: "I give thanks constantly to God for you and for the grace of God given to you in Jesus. For you have been fully enriched in him with words, as well as with knowledge. ...You do not lack any spiritual gift and only await the glorious coming of Christ Jesus, our Lord." And Paul assures them: "He will keep you steadfast to the end, and then for that final coming of Jesus, you will be without reproach on the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus. Then, the faithful God will not fail you after calling you to this communion of life with his Son, Jesus."

Be alert; be prepared to celebrate with deeper understanding the mystery of Jesus becoming one of us when we celebrate the feast of Christmas. But be alert to finding Jesus in those who hunger, thirst, are homeless, who are suffering in any way. Then you can be sure you'll be alert when the final coming of Jesus happens and we are drawn into the fullness of the life of God forever.

[Homily given Dec. 2 at St. Anne Parish in Frankfort, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]