

## Seeking the Christ

*Advent reflection for Saint Louis parish young adults*

given in Ellicott City, Maryland

December 14, 2007

We are in the midst of Advent, of this particular season,  
in which the Church invites us to focus on Christ coming.  
In a sense, of course, in our lives as children of God, in our lives as Christians,  
it is always Advent and Christmas and Lent and Easter and Pentecost  
and Immaculate Conception and and...

The Church does, however, invite us, as a community, liturgically,  
that is to say, in our communal public gatherings of worship,  
to focus on an aspect of the mystery of the Christ,  
to focus on an aspect of the mystery of the Christ  
who *comes* to us and whom we *seek* to know and to love.

**Advent**, from the Latin *ad-venio*, “to come to” is precisely about Christ coming.  
Christ is coming!

That is why we are here.

Just as Saint Paul says “If Christ is not risen, vain is our faith” (I Corinthians 15:17),  
we can say “If Christ is not *coming*, vain is our faith”.

Now, typically, we think of Advent in terms of preparation for Christmas  
*on good day!*

On a good day, on good *days* (anywhere between 21 and 28 of them,  
depending on the year), we prepare to commemorate the birth of the Savior, the Christ.  
Societally, however, it seems, in many ways, that we are having a bad day.

What is happening around us is that the weeks of Advent have largely become

- Christmas already here
- Christmas spilled over backwards in time  
so much so that Christmas Day is often a let-down,  
a day strewn with a lot of tacky wrapping paper.

When Christmas arrives, we have not prepared it, we have already celebrated it.

If, however, in the midst of

- the commercial madness
- the unfortunate personal dissipation,

we are able to stay focused, we indeed prepare for Christmas  
and, with a certain joy, commemorate the birth of Christ.

But is this all?

Is this Advent and Christmas?

Is this our focus?

Are we preparing a pious commemorative re-enactment of the Nativity?

So, we build a crèche, a manger, with all the characters – save, baby Jesus, of course, whom someone discreetly places Christmas Eve, and then we all gather, and act surprised, “Lookee here: a baby! Could it be Jesus? It must be. Here are Mary and Joseph.” Then we open presents, have a killer brunch with mimosas, to be followed by the crowning ritual of cleaning up the mountain of paper (trying not to feel too guilty for the incredible environmentally-unfriendly waste).

The Christmas celebration and its preceding time of preparation is more than a commemoration of the event of the Nativity.

We celebrate, that is to say, we *welcome anew*

- the Incarnate Word
- the Logos made flesh
- the Son become human
- the mystery of the Christ

The first coming of this mysterious God-man, Jesus, *was* an event, *quite* the event.

But there is more than an event.

There is a *person* (in fact, there are three persons who always travel in a pack of three: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!).

There is a person who, because he has come, is present.

And, insofar as we are engaged by him in loving relationship, in which we are free, he keeps coming.

His presence, over time, intensifies.

One day, his presence will become manifest, he will manifest himself, and will engage humanity and the Cosmos in a definitive way.

This we call the Second Coming.

If this whole divine adventure is about Presence and about the completion of divine love, then the Second Coming makes sense of the First Coming.

Advent and Christmas, consequently, turn us towards the Second Coming.

Christmas is indeed a time of joy and gratitude and sharing.

But it also

- tears open our hearts
- awakens a thirst for Christ to “come” definitively by taking final merciful hold of us and of everything

It is not so much about “here” and “there”, “now” and “then”, but about Christ *present* who has yet to transfigure all things in divine love, and who does

We desire the One who is hidden but really present

(indeed, we cannot desire that which has not touched us or impacted us in some way).

The Second Coming is not a distant event.

It is the Incarnate Risen Word manifesting himself gloriously.

And so, each year, the Church encourages us, as a community, liturgically,  
to want Christ to “come” definitively.

But, know that the stuff of our daily lives can encourage such desire.

There is not simply a cyclical liturgical mandate.

The many desires that arise in us can serve this desire.

The many struggles that arise can serve this desire.

When we are in our 20’s and early 30’s in particular

- the road ahead is wide and full of possibility
- dreams are big
- we find ourselves full of hope and expectation (occasionally with a touch of fear)

And in the midst of growth and planning and wonder and sometimes pain,  
the question of God arises.

- Where is Christ in all this?
- How do I engage Jesus at this place in the journey?
- What is God’s will for me?

If Christ is present and Christ is coming, then our purpose  
– wherever we are on life’s path and whatever may be happening in our lives –  
is to seek him.

How do we prepare his coming? By *seeking* him.

And we seek him most fundamentally by

- *wanting* him
- *desiring* him
- *thirsting for* him

which is an act of the will.

In other words, seeking Jesus is a *personal adventure*, not an *emotional trip*.

The *will* is the faculty of the person, that is to say, what engages our person, *us*.

And this means that no one and nothing can hinder us from seeking him.

Moreover,

- all that characterizes this phase of life and
- all that is happening in our own personal lives  
finishing school, starting a new job, painfully ending a relationship,  
moving, experiencing family hardship ...  
can serve as a springboard to “willing Christ”.

We are to seek Christ like the Magi, that is to say,

- willing to go to great lengths
- willing to lay ourselves before him like precious gifts

We are to seek him where he comes to encounter us:

not in a stable in Bethlehem, but in the humble (and humbling) frailty of our lives.

*We* are Bethlehem.

Jesus comes to inhabit our weakness, such that we can say with Saint Paul,

“When I am weak, then I am strong” (II Corinthians 12:10) and

“I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (II Corinthians 11:30)

(ask Oprah to explain that!)

We are to seek him where he comes to encounter us in another special way:

the Sacraments.

- Reconciliation, where Jesus pours forth his merciful love on our hardened hearts to soften and re-fashion them
- Eucharist, where Jesus gives himself as food to transform us into himself
- Matrimony, where Jesus takes hold of a particular love of friendship to make it a special pathway to himself
- Holy Orders, where Jesus takes hold of a human being's vitality to make of him an instrument for the gifts of the sacraments

or, beyond the sacraments

- Religious Life, where Jesus comes into the secrecy of the human heart to move a person to give him or herself completely through the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience

It is in seeking him that we are found.  
It is in seeking him that we accomplish his will.  
God's will is not God's game-plan, as we sometimes think.  
Jesus is not going to send you a chart for your life  
    with all that he wants you to accomplish.  
Jesus does not text message – never has, never will.  
That is the wrong schema  
We are not called to doing for God.  
We are called to being “through him, with him, and in him”.  
God's will for you is intimacy with him.  
Pray for guidance in your decisions and choices.  
But, above all, *seek* him in and through all things  
    and in that seeking, try to make intelligent decisions and choices,  
    and he will guide you.  
God does not make decisions and choices for you.  
That would be an insult to you humanity.  
Most often, we do not sense his guidance.  
Know that he is making use of the good and the bad in our lives to draw us to himself,  
    that is to say, to bring about his will in us.  
This is our hope.  
Hope allows us to yield to  
    • such loving intervention  
    • the Divine Will  
Hope is what  
    • moves us to seek  
    • makes us seekers  
Let us be hopeful and continue our search.