

Insights in Liturgy

In The Morning You Will See His Glory

By DAVID E. NOWAK

Our Advent Hope is in the waiting. It is our waiting upon the Lord which is an image of all our life's journey intensified during these days of Advent.

Advent is not the bored, uninterested "waiting room" in an airport or a train station. It is not the inattention of a "waiter" or "waitress" who shows no compassion for the groans of hunger all around them. Advent is the kind of waiting which is a kind of caring for or attending to time. It is not merely passing through time, or a distraction to

make the time go faster; but it is a time for alertness, sensitivity, deep personal involvement, and the likelihood of pain and fear.

Advent is the kind of waiting found in the vigils we keep late at night when our children are sick, or when waiting for a close friend to arrive from a distant city. It is the waiting of a mother before her child is born who asks: will it be alright? — how much longer? — how much will I love him? For this kind of waiting, time is important. Time is an eventful time, full of hope and promise, even as it frightens us by the

possibilities it carries.

In the Season of Advent, we Christians are professional waiters. We keep watch for the moment when Jesus will finally and astonishingly reveal himself. In Advent, we are watching and waiting with the Psalmist who sings, "I am listening. What is the Lord saying?"

Advent is the time of silence, like a gentle snowfall covering the earth. We do our part when we stop and listen, when we wait for the Lord to cover us with his own radiance.

Advent is not a time of waiting for the Lord to come at Bethlehem as a baby. He has already done that; we already have that treasure; he is already with us.

We are not trying to forget Bethlehem but to focus our waiting beyond that small town and stable to the fuller gift of His brimming Presence to be shown at the end of time. The Bethlehem story and stable scene is the beginning, and a window onto the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the glorious hope of all Creation that Jesus will come again. The Bethlehem story points us to the future and guides our longing, giving us hope, reassuring us that Jesus will come again — this time to take us all with him to the Kingdom of his Father forever.

Caught up in this marvelous hope, we carefully wait upon his coming with a longing thrilled by His Presence already breaking into our lives. We cry out, "Come, Lord Jesus!" — a foretaste of our heavenly

victory song.

Simone Weil wrote that "the effort that brings a soul to salvation is like the effort of looking or listening; it is the kind of effort by which a fiancée accepts her lover. It is an act of attention and consent."

God is hidden but not cut off from His People. He is hidden in the very time and space of our lives. We need to stop and listen to His movements within our lives, waiting to give birth to our fullest joy. If we are unaware of His Presence, it is not because He is absent but because we have become dulled to His touch and immune to surprise. Advent conspires to inspire in us a prayer of surprise and expectation. When God has become predictable in our lives Advent shatters the walls we have built around our own expectations.

Advent prepares our hearts to leap up in His Presence like the yet unborn John in his mother's womb when the Mother of God approached. Now we are "still as a stone" (EX. 15:16), awed by the very hope of meeting our God at last. The world waits, in the words of the prophet Zephaniah, "silent before the Lord God" (Zep 1:7)

This desire for God is itself the beginning of His Presence. It is His impulse meeting us in our own hearts as God's gift. This is our Emmanuel, God-with-us. This is the source of our hope. This is the touch by which our soul rejoices in the promise of future joy.

Immersed in the divine reality our lives show forth, we watch for the day when

becomes enraged and causes frightful disturbances in a room. But what infuriates him most is the fact that a mere human being commands him, issues orders to him — an "angel," albeit a fallen one! Satanic pride just can't seem to take this. As a consequence the demon turns on the exorcist and so vilifies him that the utter contempt of fallen angels for all that is flesh is clearly revealed.

St. Thomas says the sin of the angels was they could not accept God as a man. It was too humiliating for proud Lucifer's spirit — yet not for God's Son. His love for us was so great that no humiliation was too great for Him to endure for us.

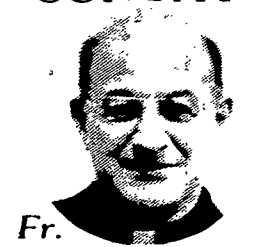
Paul put it thus: "Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at (like Lucifer). Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of man" (Phil 2:6-7).

That is why behind all our jollification at Christmas, we should not try to escape a sense of awe, almost a sense of fright, at what God has done. We must never allow anything to blind us to the true significance of what happened at Bethlehem so long ago.

We celebrate at Christmas, no myth, no traditional folklore, but a solemn fact. God once became one of us. He visited us — silently, unobtrusively, quietly. He will do the same again for anyone whose heart is open to receive Him. Do not let the preoccupations, the anxieties, the rejoicings, and the celebrations of the season crowd out room in the inn of our hearts for the Son of God, who loves us so dearly and so deeply.

Merry Christmas!

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 2:1-14 (R1) Is. 9:1-3, 5-6 (R2) Ti. 2:11-14

There is an old saying that "familiarity breeds contempt." This is not always true. The more we know a truly good person, the more we love him. Only people who are superficial, or at heart unreal, who let us down when we really get to know them, can cause previous admiration to turn into contempt.

In regard to situations, familiarity can breed contempt, but this can be very dangerous. The sea is awe-inspiring; but no matter how familiar one becomes with it, he must never lose respect for it. The same is true of men working on high-voltage lines: familiarity could be lethal.

The danger that faces us each Christmas is not so much contempt as a kind of indifference. Familiarity may blind us to the shining fact that lies at the heart of Christmas. We cannot help but be involved in the frantic business of buying and sending gifts and cards, in enjoying the decorations, the feasting, the jolliness, the general atmosphere of good will that almost magically permeates the days of Christmas. But we may not always see clearly the historic fact which is the source of all the rejoicing.

What we celebrate at Christmas is the incredible love of God for man: a love so great as to send His Son to become one of us. This demanded an abysmal condescension and so an incredible love. St. John tried to suggest this by using the word "flesh." "The Word was made flesh."

I myself never realized how abhorrent "flesh" could be to a spirit, until I read "Hostage to the Devil," by Malachi Martin. The book is a true, awesome account of the possession and exorcism of five living Americans, documented by Martin, a former Jesuit professor at the prestigious Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.

When the priest exorcist reaches the point of driving a demon out of a possessed person the spirit of evil

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Vatican Announces NFP Conference

Vatican City (RNS)—An international conference marking the 10th anniversary of Pope Paul's encyclical, Humanae Vitae, which condemned the use of artificial methods of contraception including the pill, will be held in Melbourne, Australia, Feb. 10-19, 1978, Vatican Radio reported.

It noted that Melbourne is the home of Dr. John Billings, one of the pioneers of the ovulation method of "natural family planning."

The papal encyclical, which stirred up a storm of controversy, was published July 25, 1968.

The radio said the aim of the Melbourne conference, at which "outstanding international specialists"

will be featured, is to present the recent advances on natural family planning, to train prospective teachers of natural methods, and to study "in depth" the philosophy, theology, and sociology of family planning "with particular reference to papal pronouncements and Church teachings."

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