

Airport delay spurs Advent reflections

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark
Monday, December 3

It is 4:15 p.m., and I am at Washington's National Airport waiting for a flight scheduled to leave for Rochester at 5:55 p.m. The agent at the desk told me that our airport was closed for a while this morning because of weather and that arriving flights were still delayed. This column is due first thing tomorrow morning, so I thought I would work on it now. I am tired, but I won't be less tired when I arrive home. And maybe some work on this will start my motor again.

As I mentioned to you last week, I came to Washington to participate in a symposium on "The Wisdom of Women." It was sponsored by our bishops' Committee on Women in the Church and Society. I was invited by the steering committee to deliver the keynote address.

The committee invited me to speak about conversion, not in an abstract, theoretical way, but about the conversion that you and I are called to experience in one way or another all through our lives. And the committee asked me to add to the talk a dimension of my own personal experience of conversion, especially as any piece of that conversion came about through my association with women in our church.

As I finally shaped the talk, I did it in three parts: 1) a development of the notion of conversion as a life-long reality that touches the whole person; 2) a sharing of my own experience of ongoing conversion as I have experienced it through my years of ministry in Rome and as I have experienced it in my ministry among you; and 3) some areas in which I feel the church is called to ongoing conversion. For this part of the talk I adapted an address I offered last spring at St. Bernard's Institute.

I always approach such projects with a certain amount of fear and trepidation, especially when the audience I will be addressing hails from all over the nation. In this instance, there were women from about 100 dioceses ranging from Florida to Alaska and from Maine to California. They received my work with considerable kindness, and for that I am most grateful. I am grateful as well to you for the support of your prayers all through the symposium.

You were represented by four members of our diocesan Women's Commission — Judith O'Brien, Kathi Piehler, Charlotte Keller and Susanna Marie Hoffman, SSJ. With about 250 other people we heard speakers; experienced prayer, seminars and panels; and enjoyed entertainment and informal conversation. And the five of us

had the opportunity on Friday evening to share a dinner together at a restaurant near the hotel. The four women insisted that we visit an Italian restaurant. I am glad that they did.

Whenever I complete a program such as this one, I feel the need for time and quiet to reflect on what has happened, what it means, what it confirms, what it calls me to reconsider, where I need to go. That certainly is true after the symposium. It was full of ideas and emotion, and I know that it will be speaking to my spirit for some time to come.

It makes me happy that such an intense event coincides with the beginning of Advent. It is a wonderful season in which to remember, to reflect on, think and pray about the experiences of life. Our faith tells us that the care of our loving God is with us through all of this, and illumines our understanding of what we have experienced through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But to whatever degree of understanding we come, we know it will not be complete. God's work is not yet finished in us. One day it will be so when Christ comes again. We believe that. We remember that in the Advent season, and we ask God to strengthen our belief.



Peace to all.
P.S. During the writing of this column, an announcement was made that our flight to Rochester was cancelled. Mechanical difficulties. I am now on a plane bound for Boston. Will keep you informed.
P.P.S. After retrieving my lost suitcase at Logan Airport in Boston — with the kind help of an agent — I now sit on the plane bound for Rochester. And I have a seat in the first-class section. Why I don't know. Perhaps the agent took pity on a weary traveler. In any case, I'm not going to ask. I'll just enjoy it.

Prefaces look beyond Christ's birth to fullness of his final coming

By Sister Estelle Martin
Guest contributor

We are Advent people who reach to touch the reality of Christ-in-our-midst, reassured by the birth-event of our incarnate God, eagerly awaiting the fullness of his coming at the end of time. The two preface-prayers of Advent give expression to this hope-filled anticipation.

The preface itself is an ancient prayer that introduces the Eucharistic Prayer and highlights its tone of praise and thanksgiving. The familiar dialogue that opens every preface formally invites the gathered assembly to prayer:

The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give thanks and praise.



The beginning and ending statements of all preface-prayers are also similar: affirming that "always and everywhere" we give thanks to God "through Jesus Christ our Lord;" and in closing, the heavenly liturgy is linked with the liturgy of earth through the singing of the everlasting hymn of the angels: Holy, holy, holy ...

But it is the centerpiece of these prayers enclosed by our proclamations of praise that gives voice to our particular focus for worshipping God as Creator and Redeemer. Some 80 different prefaces, spread throughout the liturgical year,

celebrate the people and events that reveal God's saving action to us.

Let us lift up our hearts and pray with the central text of each of the Advent prefaces:

When he (Jesus) humbled himself to come among us as man he fulfilled the plan you (God) formed long ago

and opened for us the way of salvation. Now we watch for the day hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours when Christ our Lord will come again in glory.

This first preface (First Sunday of Advent to Dec. 16) echoes the words of John in his Gospel prologue: "In the beginning was the Word; ... and the Word was God ... the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (Jn 1:1, 14).

The second Advent preface (Dec. 17 to Dec. 24) places a parallel message within the historic event of Christ's first appearance among us: foretold by the prophets, accomplished through the willingness of Mary, heralded by the life and witness of John the Baptist.

His (Christ's) future coming was proclaimed by all the prophets.

The virgin mother bore him in her womb with love beyond all telling. John the Baptist was his herald and made him known when at last he came.

In his love Christ has filled us with joy as we prepare to celebrate his birth, so that when he comes he may find us watching in prayer, our hearts filled with wonder and praise.

The burning words of Old Testament prophets reverberate through the ages and find fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, born of Mary.

We look beyond the commemoration of his birth to grasp the rebirth of his final coming. We hold our hearts in awe, overflowing with thanks and praise, awaiting the day when the fullness of Christ will be revealed to us.

This Advent message penetrates these two prayers and challenges us to remember, to proclaim and to await the coming.

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