

# Waiting can be rewarding

In early November, I was shopping at one of America's largest retail chains for a new watch. Spotting a bargain in the clearance section for only \$5, I proceeded to the express line in order to pay for my new-found time piece. The person immediately in front of me only had a few items, and so I thought, I'll be out of here in no time.

Much to my chagrin, the person ahead of me handed the cashier a coupon for one of the items he had purchased. As luck would have it, the coupon couldn't be scanned. The cashier then proceeded to input the appropriate codes into the register, whereupon a beeping sound ensued from the machine. After a few more attempts to correctly input the data, the gods of the computer world utterly refused to be appeased and even more beeping occurred.

By now the express line had grown considerably longer with several individuals behind me. We all emitted a collective groan as we watched the cashier reach up to turn on the magic light above the register, signaling that she needed help in order to perform the correct computer rituals. The cashier apologized, and we waited ... and waited ... and waited. As

the seconds turned into what seemed like endless hours, the gentleman immediately behind me began to audibly voice his discontent. And we waited ... and waited.

At long last the manager on duty approached the cashier, but alas even he couldn't figure out the problem. At this point the line behind me began to jump ship as patrons fled from the express aisle to other waiting cashiers. The gentleman standing in line behind me began to use language that I am not allowed to put into print, and he, too, rushed over to another line. And I waited ... and waited. I began to think maybe I, too, should just move to another line and give up my prime spot. But then again I also thought that as soon as I moved into what now were endlessly longer lines at each of the open registers, the problem in my line would be resolved. I was caught in a dilemma. And I waited ... and waited.

I began to think that this was really a grace-filled moment. I could chose to become angry and upset and flee the moment (as the gentleman behind me), or I could chose to wait in joyful hope that the problem would be resolved and we would be on our way. I was caught betwixt and

## The Forum

For this month's viewpoints section, the *Courier* invited a priest to talk about how best to celebrate Advent and an expectant mother to talk about preparing for the birth of her first child.

between. There was a good deal of anxiety building in my desire to leave ... and at the same time a hope that invited me just to hang in there.

Advent is a time of waiting. The origin of the term comes the Latin word *adventus* ("the coming"). It originally referred to the triumphal return of the great Roman generals like Julius Caesar. After the news of his victories in Gaul reached Rome, the Senate voted unanimously that a triumphal procession (an *adventus*) await the hero. The entire people of Rome would wait for the day when Caesar and his army would return and enter the city. Then a festive spirit accompanied this *adventus*. Sacrifices, celebrations and athletic contests were held in honor of Caesar as he made his way to the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter.

It was no surprise then that early church used the same imperial language as Christians awaited their Lord and Savior. Jesus promised to return, and the entire Christian community kept a vigil. Twenty-one centuries later we are still keeping the vigil. Throughout the Advent season our focus is waiting ... waiting for the Lord. It creates both a longing and an invitation. Throughout this season we'll remember the first advent of Christ with all the excitement and splendor of our Christmas celebrations. But we're also reminded that we are a pilgrim church, ever vigilant for Christ's final advent. Don't we all need to simply slow down and wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ? Every time we celebrate the Eucharist we gather to keep vigil for the Lord's return. As such our lives and our service should proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes in glory.

But waiting is an art form that is all but lost in our consumer society. The same retail chain I visited in early November already had fully decorated Christmas trees ready for purchase on Oct. 21. By Dec. 26, we'll all be so exhausted from shopping, eating, celebrating and appearing to be merry that we'll be thankful Christmas is finally over! Our culture has



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

### Father George Heyman.

turned the powerful symbols of the season into merchandise that can easily be yours for three easy payments!

Advent beckons us to slow down, to wait. In ancient Rome, while there was external happiness ostensibly visible for the returning general, there was also more than a little apprehension. If Caesar conquered Gaul, then he could also impose that same power upon the citizens of Rome (which is exactly what he did). Advent admits the longing in our hearts. For many the commercial merry-making of the season brings reminders of the great lack that looms so large in each of our hearts; the loved ones who have died, the relationships that have not worked out, the peace that is still elusive on planet Earth. The purple we use is both reflective of the royal purple worn by the conquering Roman hero and the darkness of unfulfilled promises. And we wait ... and we wait.

Just as I made a choice to remain in line until the problems of the cash register were fixed, we are all faced with the same choices this Advent. As we prepare for Christmas we can allow the consumer culture to overwhelm us, or we can truly wait with both longing and joy in our hearts for the coming of our Savior. Jesus will return as he promised. Until that time we wait ... and we wait. But as Christians we need to learn to slow down. In a sense we have to relearn how to wait in joyful hope.

After the manager fixed the problem at the register, I was next in line and out the store in no time. The gentleman who was originally behind me was still waiting in another line.

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