

[Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8]

Many years ago, I saw two different bumper stickers on the back of a car that would be appropriate for Advent: “Jesus is coming... Look busy!” and “Jesus is coming, and boy is He ticked off!” But St. Peter doesn’t leave us twisting in the wind. He exhorts us to be blameless, to live faithfully, and to put the needs of others ahead of our own. That is the positive incentive to do what is good. Not just to “look” busy – but to GET busy!

First impressions tell a lot. Mark begins his gospel with the words of a wild man, a desert dweller, a rabble rouser, a voice crying out in the wilderness. Clearly something significant is about to happen for everyone -- ready or not. So the point is to get ready. Sometimes when you know something big is going to happen, it is comforting (as the First Reading suggests) to get the ball rolling.

These days, with instant delivery from Amazon or our local supermarket, we are not used to waiting. Even the smallest delay in the loading of a website is an occasion of near sin. And yet, over the last nine months, we have been forced to wait. We waited for an end to the first lockdown related to COVID-19. And now we are on the cusp of a third wave. We waited for cases to drop in our communities. Now, the numbers are growing. And we still wait for a vaccine that enables us to gather once more with one another. This experience of keeping vigil for a vaccine, for liberation from an endless COVID-tide, could be helpful for the Catholic desiring to learn how to keep Advent vigilance and to be patient.

Israel, after all, knew what it meant to wait for the Lord. The kingdom of Judah was in exile in Babylon, longing for a return to the land of the Temple. Their wait was not brief – it took nearly 70 years to get to the Promised Land.

And yet, this waiting was not fruitless. Their longing for God grew. The comfort that the Lord offered bore fruit in a heart waiting for liberation.

On this Second Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist is announced with the very words of comfort spoken by God through the prophet Isaiah. Just as God opened a highway through a desert of desolation, John the Baptist announces to the remnant of Israel that the time of redemption is at hand.

John is a prophet, clothed with camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey. His strangeness and simplicity are at once part of the proclamation. Turn away from sin, recommit yourself to fidelity to the Law.

And yet, John speaks to the gathered crowds in the Judean desert about a further posture of vigilance. There is someone coming greater than John. John may be the first rays of dawn of the kingdom, but he is not the sun. The crowds must wait for the coming of the Messiah, the one whose sandals the Baptist is not fit to tie.

We know who John is waiting for. We know his name: Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed One. We know that He is the One Who has come to heal us from the power of sin and death, Who died upon the cross and rose again.

And yet, we share with the gathered crowd in the desert a vocation to vigilance, to patience, to waiting. Christ will come again. He will come to judge the nations, He will come to wipe tears from the eyes of all who wait for redemption, and He will come to address you and me. Christ is coming!

And the very same longing we have for the end of COVID-19, for the advent of a vaccine and for a chance to celebrate the holidays with our family is how we should approach the second coming of Jesus Christ. We must not grow tired of waiting for Our Lord, lax in our awareness that Christ will come again. Longing is good for us. Desire for the presence of Our Lord is good.

The waiting, of course, is hard. And yet, waiting increases our desire. We must learn to anxiously await the return of Our Lord.

Your reflection questions to ponder this week:

Am I feeling led by God? How patient am I? In my waiting, do I remain faithful? What am I waiting for? What will "the thief" take away? My complacency? My illusions about myself? The fantasy world I live in? What will remain? Faith? Where do I go to prepare for the coming of Christ? A place of busyness? A place of emptiness? Where do I best meet God? Spoiler alert – you will hear God in the silence, not in all the noise that surrounds us!

This weekend is the annual collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious. Many communities of religious men and women worked for years

proclaiming the Good News through education, medicine and social justice ministries and services. They received little or no pay, just room and board in some cases. Now, in their old age and retirement, they have no income or savings to pay for their care. Religious brothers and sisters in their 80's and 90's continue to work if they can to support those who cannot.

Our own Sr. Pat Whalen is considered a "junior sister" in her community! Several are in their 80's or 90's and still working in ministry and service. There are a few Dominican senior Sisters living in our community who still volunteer in parish ministries. I was taught by Dominican Sisters in grade school, and Jesuit priests in the seminary. Our own Sr. Noreen O'Connell, who worked for years here on procuring annulments, is enjoying her third year of retirement at the motherhouse in Adrian at age 93.

I was friends with Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, from Monroe, now all gone to their eternal reward. Let us show our appreciation for these prophetic men and women who pointed the way to the Lamb of God and who taught us patient and humble service, by supporting the Retirement Fund for Religious with our prayers and with our financial support. Envelopes are at the sides of our new offertory basket boxes.

Jesus indeed is coming. Let's not just LOOK busy, let's GET busy! Conducting ourselves "in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord."

Come, Lord Jesus! Do not delay! AMEN!