

ADVENT 2016

We are here! It is beginning

This is the season that pays attention to our waiting for the fullness of God's work!



Our modern world has such a hard time with waiting. Everything must be instant. If I cannot have it immediately then I will move onto something else. When we live entitled lives we are extremely demanding of others and of life itself.

The wisdom of our faith tells us that the work of God is not complete. We are far from reaching the ultimate of our lives.

At this very moment there are wars where one group is

destroying and lording it over another group. People are fleeing with their small babies to a safe country. Within our own families there are relatives who actually dislike each other with a ferocity seldom encountered in the animal kingdom. They could destroy each other, the dislike is so great!

Advent locates us in a very imperfect world.

We are waiting for more.

And God will be our 'more' to make this life meaningful.

Candle one: The Advent Wreath

The four candles of the Advent wreath have become a sign and a reminder that we are imperfect. There is so much more that needs to happen in God's time and place.

On this first Sunday of Advent light the first candle in remembrance of the harm that war has done to so many humans. As we have spent the year resettling refugees from the Middle East into our country, stand with all those young mothers and fathers as they settle into a new country, learn a new language and adjust to a culture that is very different from what they know. They have come here out of hope. Now, come to God this Advent with your hope to build a world of peace, respect and understanding.

THIS ADVENT, DO NOTHING, JUST BE WITH OUR GOD

For everyone in life, some of most powerful lessons on life did not happen by reading a book, listening to a university lecture or watching a dramatic film. Some of the greatest moments in life came in silence.

Think of the hours that you held your young wife's hand while she was in her nine and a half hours of labour. Hardly a word was spoken but you were so totally present to each other. You listened to her breathing and she to yours! In the inhaling of air you communicated at a very deep level. Now, forty-nine years later you still remember all those moments and hours.

The same with our religious faith. We can be so busy doing religious things that we miss God. Instead of being a helping ladder to bring us into the presence of God, our busy religion can become an actual stumbling block. Imagine, 'I tripped over my religion trying to get to God!'

During these four weeks try to move into the presence of God. Just sit with the Word of God. Allow it to soak into your skin like the

sunlight soaks into your cold cheeks when you are outside during December. Prayer is not directed towards accomplishing anything, (like trying to get your entire house vacuumed in thirty minutes).

Just be. Pray with wide open hands and allow God to be present to your spirit. Allow God to sit close to you and just be God in those moments.

**DOES THE CHRISTMAS SEASON PLAY YOU OUT?**

Do you find that you are so busy during this Christmas season (remember that you have had two weeks of advertizing already) that you are getting tired? Does the repetitive Christmas music already sound boring? What do

you have to look forward to this holiday season?

Only the older grandparents would remember this. They grew up when there was a special treat during the Christmas season. Your parents would stretch the family budget and buy a box of jap oranges. Remember, those round oranges individually wrapped in white tissue paper? They were so sweet. It was such a treat to have an orange stuffed into the bottom of your sock. This was so brief but so enjoyable.

Now, in our prosperity, we can have jap oranges all through

the year. Having too much (material wealth) has made us all the poorer (spiritual joy).

We may never be able to go back but the challenge for 2016 is to create a meaningful time of spiritual longing, seeking and being lead by the very Spirit of God. We may be in the desert of spiritual meaning but the Holy Spirit is leading us to be creative and seek the movements of God in new ways.

ALLOW ISAIAH TO LEAD YOU INTO ADVENT

One of the most helpful ways to pray the Scriptures is to use your imagination and enter into the very scene that the prophet Isaiah is speaking from. The Hebrews were people in deep suffering. They are looking for protection from their oppressors. They are groaning under severe taxation. Will anyone lift the burden of their suffering off their shoulders?

Look through the eyes of a suffering people. Hear with ears that long for a good word!

There is going to come a time when you will be triumphant as a people. Many people (the pagans) will ask to come to the mountain of God. They will want to know and follow the God of the Hebrews.

And then there will come a time when there will be no more war (meaning you will not suffer again). Chew over the powerful image: "They will beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Is. 1,4)

Sit with this message of hope. Move into 2016 and remember all the wars, the bombing and the thousands of people fleeing the bombing and destruction of their towns, houses, highways and businesses. Things have gotten so bad that their only option is to flee to a safe country.

Meditate on these words in the present context. How can these suffering people fleeing the Middle East understand the power and protection of God?

**ISAIAH LEADS US TO PRAYER**

I begin my prayer, God of my Advent, with all the people who are living in refugee camps. They are frustrated with a blank future, no job and living

on UN rations. Bring my heart to hear their frustrations and cry for help.

I move, God of my Advent, to all the people throughout the world who are helping others, whether it is finding housing, schooling for their children, jobs and medical attention. Bring my heart to be with people who are making a difference.

Lift me, God of my Advent, beyond any complaining and grumbling. I know it is so easy

to see how things are not getting done by government people, but lift my eyes to see the ordinary kindnesses that are being done to others.

May I never miss one act of thoughtfulness done to a sister or brother in need.

Make the sword beaten down into plough shares (to grow food) happen within my own heart.

JESUS COMES IN THE UNEXPECTED MOMENTS OF LIFE



The first message from Advent is stay awake. Be alert! You do not know when the Lord will break through in new and unexpected ways.

Sometimes we are slow to catch on. What a surprise! No one expected God to break through into the human race and be

born of a unknown young woman (without power) in the outbacks of the world. This was totally unplanned and unrehearsed.

Today, take the warning words of Jesus (Mt. 24, 36-44) and apply them to your own life.

When did God break through by moving your difficult relatives to move towards reconciliation. Maybe you have had a family of cousins that have not spoken to each other for fifteen years. Something is moving them to begin to listen to one another.

When God moves your heart do not be surprised if God moves you to greater goodness and compassion. Maybe there are people you dislike. The movement of God's Spirit may move you to greater understanding of these difficult people.

Remember God is always a surprise. No one controls God. God moves where God moves. God is like the Saskatchewan December wind. Look how it moves.

HAVE YOUR ENTIRE PARISH STAND AROUND THE ADVENT WREATH

The first candle calls everyone to be wide awake to the call of God. Do not get caught up in the over consumption of the goods of this earth.

Touch the temperature of your heart in its love for the poor who live so close to us. What do you feel?



Touch the first candle again. What is God asking of your parish community in 2016?

How is the light of that first candle moving the people of the Church to be a people who build peace and secure justice?

Touch the green branches of the wreath. There is divine life flowing in your veins.