

First Sunday of Advent.

Nov 27, 2022

If you've ever hosted a party, you know that it can be tricky business. Things don't always go as planned. Food doesn't always come out of the oven the way we'd like. Beverages sometimes run out, forcing others to run to the store to re-supply. Sometimes the "mix" of people isn't that good, and conversation can be either pretty non-existent or confrontational.

Guests can track-in snow or dirt if they aren't paying attention. And if there are competing sporting events on TV, like what's going on in Qatar, fans can strongly disagree as to which game to watch. Yes - when it comes to throwing a party, not everything unfolds as we would like. There almost always are "surprises" that catch us off-guard.

And one thing that can really drive us crazy (when hosting a party) is when people don't show up when we've asked them to - not that we need people to arrive to the minute. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the people who show up either an hour early or two hours late.

And when that happens, it drives the hosts crazy. Why can't they simply show up when they are expected? We set a time. We inform them of the time. And they show up whenever they please. It just doesn't seem right.

**"So too, you also must be prepared,
for at an hour you do not expect,
the Son of Man will come."**

Today we begin the holy season of Advent, the start of the Church Year A, this time with St. Matthew as our guide. And once again, we begin not at the beginning, but at the end, the "finish line" so-to-speak, the destiny planned for us and for all of creation since the dawn of time. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, our brother and friend, will return in glory to bring to fulfillment all of creation and all of history - the Second Coming, as we commonly call it.

It's really comforting to know that the created world (and that means you and me) is not simply drifting aimlessly, unguided, but rather is heading somewhere, heading toward the destiny for which it was created, heading toward its source. And that source is love itself - our incredible God. And we give thanks that we are not alone.

And yet we also believe that we will be "judged", that somehow the choices we make in this life have consequences not simply in this life, but in eternity. And if we can't always understand exactly what that all means, or how it all "works", that's okay. We don't have to. Yet, Jesus seems to continually encourage us not to be complacent in our spiritual lives, not to take for granted our relationship with God. And so, he tells us,

"Therefore, stay awake!"

For two thousand years people have wondered when Jesus would return. Virtually every generation has felt that they were living in the end times. And yet, Jesus makes it quite clear that we simply cannot (nor should not) know when that day or hour will be.

In a very real sense, Jesus is telling us that tomorrow is not promised to us. All we have is this very day, this hour, this minute - this person or persons standing before us. And being faithful is simply doing the right thing in this moment and the next moment and the next and the next and the next. And that's not just good advice for Advent. It's good advice for every person who wants to live a good life, a generous, self-giving life, a holy life, a God-centered life. And so today we are invited and exhorted not to put off until tomorrow being the person God created us to be, being the best version of ourselves. He wants us to be that person right now, this very minute.

And yet, this "encounter" with the Lord Jesus, this "breaking in" that we are to be on watch for, isn't something we need to wait a lifetime for. It's not simply a one-time kind of thing. That means that Advent is not just a remembering of something long ago, nor just an anticipation of something far into the future. It's also a preparation for encountering the God right in

our midst - a God who wants to come to us in every moment, in every person, and in every situation. God wants to break into our lives today, tomorrow, and the next, and the next. Advent is meant to help us open our hearts to make that a possibility.

But it will never happen if we continue to be like the host of the party who insists that people come on time, when they are expected. No, God simply doesn't work on our schedule. Nor does he let us set the guidelines. Nor does he care very much about our plans.

Rather, God is going to come when we least expect him. He's going to be the one showing up an hour early or an hour late, in the person we like and in the person we can't stand, in the pews of our church but also in the messiness of daily life, in the family celebrations that bring us joy and in the tragedies that break our hearts, in the achievements and in the disappointments, in the wealthy neighbor and in the homeless person we cross the street to avoid.

God is in all those things, all those situations, all those people. God is everywhere. And he wants us to recognize him, acknowledge him, and let him in.

Now the million dollar question is, will we? Can we let God come to us on his terms, and not on ours?

That's what Advent is all about. And so, my friends, let's make sure that our party is an open-house, and thereby let God show up whenever he wants.