

First Sunday of Advent – December 3, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isa 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

You, LORD, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways! Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt. Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.

Psalm: Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

R. (4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Rouse your power,
and come to save us.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted,
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

May your help be with the man of your right hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Brothers and sisters: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Did you ever stay awake on Christmas Eve as a kid and sneak into a hidey hole in order to see the Christmas tree being decorated? I surely did. We kids also had big felt stockings hung on each of our bedroom doors, and I remember trying to keep an eye open during the night to see Santa or the Good Fairy or at least somebody putting prizes into it. I watched all night, until I woke up in the morning to find a bulging stocking, mysteriously full. "I want patience and I want it now," or so the joke goes. I suppose patience is not a virtue of the young. That's fine but remember, the purpose of Advent is to wait! Hopkins, the Jesuit poet, has a poem on patience that speaks to this first Sunday of Advent. It will help to read it slowly, out loud.

Patience, hard thing! The hard thing but to pray, but bid for, patience is! Patience who asks, wants war, wants wounds; weary his times, his tasks; to do without, take tosses, and obey. Rare patience roots in these and, these away, nowhere. Natural heart's ivy, Patience masks our ruins of wrecked past purpose. There she basks Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day. We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills to bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills of us we do bid God bend to him even so. And where is he who more and more distills delicious kindness? - He is patient. Patience fills His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know.

Our dearest plans and purposes often end up in wreckage, just like ancient buildings did. Hopkins says that patience resembles a field of beautiful ivy, soothing its way over the wreckage, creating soft composure. "Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves": this phrase doesn't just remind us of how ivy look, the words bathe us in the luxury, the peace and the relief of such a sight. Patience becomes a "delicious kindness," a honey that fills the combs of our lives. God's kindness provides us with comfort and also time—an allowance of days, weeks, years, and even a lifetime—to prepare, to get ready, to desire, and gradually, along the way, to receive. Patience. If there were nothing worth waiting for, then such a virtue would be silly. Yet the birth of Christ into this world and into our hearts is quite worth the waiting for. Some object that his birth already did happen, but it is still in the process, in a surprising, mysterious way. We are still mean to our neighbors. We still hide truth from those who love us. We envy and lust after what is not ours. And the terrors of evil lurk all around us in this twenty-first century. What should we do, try harder? Yes. But the real answer is a patient waiting and welcoming for the Spirit of God to be born into our lives. And to contribute to this world every way we can.

*Taken from *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, edited by Catherine Phillips (London, New York, etc., Oxford University Press, 1986), #176.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. "... *that we were mindful of you in our ways!*"
Is there a veil that keeps you from seeing God's presence at work in your life and in your world? How can you use Advent to lift that veil, to get more in touch with God in and around you??
2. St. Paul also says "that in him you were enriched in every way." In what ways has God enriched you personally? To say Paul's words in another way, his gift to us is the blessing of everything in him. What richness in Christ is he passing on to you?
3. As vigilant gatekeepers watching for the Lord of the house, what signs do you observe that tell you God is present in the world and in your life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen