



Advent Reflections

2008

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We sometimes hear the command, “Hurry up and wait.” This paradoxical statement presents a hurried way that we can approach a time and place of “waiting”. Advent calls us to pause, listen, ponder, and to bring into ourselves a place that hungers to wait in a spirit of patience and joy. There are different attitudes that we can enter into as we are asked “to wait.” We can wait either with idle expectation or with an active attention. To be in an idle stance of expectation would be characterized by feelings of emptiness, discontentment, and restlessness, boredom, lacking desire or focus. In this attitude the one who waits is seen and felt as non-essential or unimportant. However, an active attitude in “waiting” could be characterized as an experienced that is filled with anticipation, calmness, patience, listening, longing, excitement, and receptivity. In this place the one who “waits” is essential and important.

These Advent Reflections of Tommy King, O.F.M., offer us the opportunity to enter into an active form of “waiting” during this Advent Season. His reflections offer us a hopeful and prophetic message to create in us a place of prayer. Every person is important and essential in bringing our world the proclamation that our lives were given and recreated, to make us instruments of peace. This is the faith, joy, justice, and hope that this Season calls forth in us. (Larry Gosselin, OFM)



Opening PRAYER

Let us pray!

Lord, we your people, await the new life of Christ that is promised to creation; to all peoples, creatures, Mother Earth, and the heavens. Give us a new awakened joy and hope in Your Son, Jesus. We wait with longing, as people and prophets of old and new, for this Promised One who is our peace and life. We ask this in the name of Jesus Our Lord and brother.

Larry Gosselin, OFM

**First Sunday of Advent, November 30th.
"To Watch with Faith".**

Lord, as the dawn waits for the morning light, we long for Your Life. Come, we pray send the light that will awaken hope and alertness in joy. A child is promised to us. May we be drawn at this beginning point, to the still point of creation, the One to be born in a manger, the promised heralded King. It is in His poverty that we have our strength, and it is His humility that we are lifted up. Free us from the darkness that hinders our vision, inspire us to watch with faith. (LG)



First Sunday of Advent

Joselito has been the parish boat driver for over twenty years. Navigating the Ucayali River is not easy and I admire the skill with which he controls our little aluminum craft and its thirty horsepower engine. We often make journeys together that are three hours or more to visit some of the distant villages of the parish and I completely trust in him. He is such a good driver, I am usually relaxed enough to read, pray, listen to my Ipod or just doze a little. When the river rises in the winter, Joselito must constantly dodge pieces of trees that are floating all over. In the summer he has to constantly watch out for sand bars so as not to run aground. When we are hit with a hard tropical rain in our travels, Joselito skillfully revs up the engine and we speed through the raindrops that feel like bullets hitting your face so we can leave the storm behind us as quick as possible. And all year around, Joselito seems to have X ray vision when he constantly avoids well-hidden fishing nets that could reek havoc on the propeller. As Joselito and I travel together, my mind often wonders but Joselito is constantly alert to make sure we arrive at our destination safely.

They have a clear sense of God's promises that the prophet proclaims: "I will fix a place for my people and I will plant them so they may dwell in their place without further disturbance. . . The Lord reveals to you that he will establish a house for you." Holy people know that grace comes from God and not from buildings or any other kind of possession. Mary clearly understands this in the Gospel when she states, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord" and not her own virtues. Her humble faith and that of so many holy people I know become their "greatness." God is clearly more interested in building more communities of humble faith than physical structures. Sacred space is a profound reality but we must remember that the sacredness of places like the Holy Land and Assisi started with the blessings of God and not building projects. Inspired by today's readings, we pray for the grace of our loving and humble God to guide us in building humble communities of joyous faith. (TK)

I am only able to visit most of the other villages once every two years. However, many of the villages have animators, who are the local pastoral agents for the Catholic community and who lead the Sunday liturgy of the Word celebrations.

Since the whole chapel-building process was new to me, it was quite a learning experience. Many villages that wanted to build chapels had no active faith community. Their attitude was, "Build a church and they will come." I emphasized that *iglesia* (church) is a community of the people of God. *Templo* most accurately describes the physical building where people of faith gather. I made it clear that a *templo* would only be built after *iglesia* already existed. Some folks had a hard time with my approach just like David has a little difficulty understanding the Lord in our first reading from Second Samuel. God has to clarify to David that the central issue is faith and not a physical building.

In the parish, some villages with beautiful chapels are "dying on the vine." There is hardly any sense of communal faith and joy. Other villages just have a very small simple thatched roof chapel but are bubbling with a spirit of enthusiasm as they celebrate the presence of a loving God in their midst.

Joselito's need to constantly be alert to fulfill his duty is a great metaphor for me to understand today's Gospel. Jesus tells us, "Be watchful!" and "Be alert!". He is not warning us to be on the lookout so we can avoid God's wrath but guiding us on how to be people who live deeply conscious of the Kingdom he is proclaiming. Because Joselito is watchful and alert when he navigates the Ucayali River, he is deeply aware of the reality all aspects nature around us and we travel peacefully. Likewise, when we seek One to be prayerfully alert to the world that surrounds us, God offers us a vision of life so we can live in peace with other people and all of creation. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes it clear that God is always closer to us than we are to ourselves. The challenge for us is to be more and more alert and responsive to that loving presence through our personal prayer, community prayer and our relationships with our brothers and sisters in the human family and throughout all of creation as we seek to "navigate" our lives with the vision of God's Kingdom. The Good News is that we are never alone because our "Heavenly Boat Driver" is always guiding us. (TK)

Second Sunday of Advent, December 7th.

“To Listen with joy.”

The voice of the prophet sounds in the in the depths of life. The “cry of the poor” is heard in ancient voices throughout ages, today the voices are new. “Prepare the Way, a Highway for our God.” “Let the valleys be filled and the mountains lowered, smooth the rough ways. Comfort, give comfort and bring Good News to the poor. This is the cry of the prophet. May our voices be attuned to this voice of hope. May we be the hope that is Your promise to us, inspire us to listen with joy. (LG)

Second Sunday of Advent

One of the most difficult aspects of my job is the pastoral care of people in the parish who constantly must deal with inadequate health care. In my political district, there is only one doctor for every ten thousand people, no X ray machine, very crude clinical labs and often a shortage of basic medicine. The painful reality is that this injustice not only exists throughout the Peruvian Amazon but it is a reality for our sisters and brothers all throughout the Third World. Ignacio Ellacuria, one of the Jesuits martyred in El Salvador in 1989, preferred to call the poor countries the “Crucified World” because Christ continues to suffer in the poor who must daily live under inhuman conditions. Sister Guadalupe, a Franciscan sister in the parish is a very compassionate nurse and is absolutely wonderful in caring for people of all ages and a great inspiration for me. She regularly visits the sick and the dying in their homes. Sister Guadalupe would not even have basic

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 21st.

“To Remain with Hope”.

Today darkness covers the earth, in our northern hemisphere it is our darkest day of the year. It is into this darkness that we look to Christ. It is, as if on the earth, darkness has overshadowed light. Into the stillness of darkness we long for Christ to come with light. In this darkness give us a taste of hope that your birth is near. Help us build “a house made of dawn” that awakens in us that we are that shelter in whose arms all may find comfort. “The angel came and spoke, ‘The Lord be with you’.” Good News brought by Gabriel, given to Mary, meant for all. Come to us, be with us, remain with us. Inspire in us so that we may remain with hope. (LG)

Fourth Sunday of Advent

When I arrived in the parish in the Peruvian Amazon five years ago, only about twenty of the sixty-five villages in the parish had local chapels for the Catholic community. A couple of years ago, the parish received a grant from a foundation in the United States to build chapels in seven more villages where I felt there was good leadership in the local Catholic communities. Because the parish covers an area of about 3,400 square miles, I am only able to celebrate Eucharist frequently in three of the villages.

To fulfill the prophetic vocation that we all have as baptized Christians, we are called to both work for the liberation of the poor and oppressed and also provide them comfort in their time of pain—a difficult but central message of the Gospel. Like John the Baptist in today's Gospel, this is how we “prepare the way of the Lord.” In faith we trust that, in the fullness time, God will bring about complete liberation for all people who suffer. However, we know we can't just wait around for that to happen. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to continue the building up of God's kingdom that he started. As we commit ourselves to this task, the grace of God also liberates us from the oppression of our own fears and doubts. In the Kingdom of God, not only are the poor blessed but also

pain killers to offer injections to people who are dying. I am often confused and ask myself, “How do I offer comfort to people who must suffer so much injustice?”

Most certainly this type of injustice must constantly be denounced. Inspired by the example of John the Baptist and Jesus, we all are called to denounce injustice and proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom. We know that denouncing an injustice system and trying to change it to better serve the poor is a difficult and slow task. What do we do in the meantime not to lose hope? Isaiah invites us today to find comfort in God's constant and faithful presence with us—“Here is your God!” Like a shepherd, God “carries us in his bosom.” It seems to me that, after doing all we can to change an injustice system, the only other thing we can do is comfort the poor and suffering with the assurance that God loves them and is deeply present to them. As pastoral ministers, our presence and care to them is to be “physical proof” of God's loving compassion for them.

We see in today's Gospel that John the Baptist “prepares the way of the Lord” by calling his listeners to conversion. For Ellacuria, central to our commitment to ongoing conversion means asking, “What shall I do to bring down the ‘crucified people’ from the cross?” As we try to respond to that call to conversion in our own lives, with the help of the Holy Spirit promised by the Baptist we renew our commitment to denounce injustice in the world and manifest God's personal and loving presence by caring for the poor and suffering. (TK)

Third Sunday of Advent, December 14th.

“To Listen with justice.”

Rejoicing awaits us here in this place where there is justice, for this joy is near in the hearts that long for Christ to be born in the womb of the world.

“Rejoicing heartily, that the joy of my soul is in my God.” The prophet again heralds a voice in the desert, “Make straight the way of the Lord.” “Shake all the nations,” proclaims the prophet Haggai. The hope of justice, shows us One who hears our cry and whose gentle strength changes hearts. This Servant is sent to proclaim liberty and release for those bound in oppression. “‘Rejoice in the Lord always’, again I say it, ‘rejoice’.” Open our hearts to rejoice so that we may listen with justice. (LG)

Third Sunday of Advent

Even among very sincere people of good will you often hear, “I saw a lot of very poor people when I was in Guatemala (or any other Third World country), but they were very happy.” Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff reminds us that those types of observations should never be any kind of justification of the horrible poverty that so much of the world’s population suffers (including in the North America and Europe) but a testimony to the profound integrity of so many poor people who can maintain a spirit of joy in spite of their daily struggles with poverty and oppression. I have only been in Peru five years, but nevertheless I have already seen too many children and young people who, to borrow Gustavo Gutierrez’s expression, “died before their time” because of inadequate health care.

I assure you that if the well meaning but naïve tourist was with the parents of those children and young people in those moments, they would not see smiles but hear only weeping and the eternal question, “Why did God allow my child to die before me?” With that being said, I have often discussed with Gerard, my Franciscan brother who has worked in the Peruvian Amazon for fifteen years, the incredible resilience that poor people have in the face of terrible tragedies. We both know many parents in Peru who have tragically lost their children to curable diseases who do not harbor anger against God or other people for their loss. Their faith does not seem to weaken but only grows stronger as they are grateful to God for carrying them through the painful time. Most of them returned to work and the “normal” responsibilities of life the day after the funeral of their child. Just incredible!

The prophet Isaiah says to us today and Jesus repeats in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke that God offers “good news to the poor and heals the brokenhearted.” Gerard’s and my experience in Peru verify this message. But there is more to the message of the prophet: “Proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners! Announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn!”