

A Reflection on Advent

by Tom Redmond, SM

At the beginning of Lent a few years ago Anthony Fucci, the Director of our Marianist Family Retreat Center here in Cape May Point, NJ, suggested that our staff gather for a weekly prayer on Friday afternoons and asked me to organize it. Lent ended and as we moved through the Triduum into the season of Easter, Anthony and others on staff asked if we could continue this weekly gathering in prayer. What began as a weekly reflection on the Stations of the Cross during Lent transformed into a prayer with the Stations of Easter—"Meeting the Risen Jesus on the Road to Emmaus" and the "Encounter with the Good Shepherd."

This past summer I had a conversation with Carol Ramey and Dan Jordan at NACMS in Dayton to share with them some of these weekly stations of prayer. They asked if I could write some reflections for NACMS readers for the season of Advent.

The First Station of Advent: Active Awareness

When we think of Advent certain people and themes come to mind, the Prophet Isaiah encouraging us to make things ready, John the Baptist preaching loud and clear on the urgent need to change our ways, and Mary pregnant and waiting. But this year in Cycle B the readings at the beginning of Advent hold a different message. Instead of reaching back to classical Advent images, the readings of this first Sunday of Advent clearly challenge us to be awake, alert, and aware. In the second reading from 1 Corinthians Saint Paul integrates the messages of Isaiah 63 (like clay, we are being molded by God's own hands) and Mark 13 (stay awake and alert). He writes to remind the Corinthians (and us) that we are indeed richly gifted in Christ, not lacking any spiritual gifts as we wait for the (full) revelation of Christ. As we listen to these three readings and the call to be awake and alert, this first Sunday of Advent challenges us to be aware of the kingdom of God and how it is unfolding before us here and now! Many authors on the spiritual life write of awareness as the starting point and the continuing stance in the journey toward wholeness and holiness.

But the Scripture readings are not the only words we hear this first Sunday of Advent. With this first Sunday of Advent, Catholics in the English-speaking world began using the third edition of the Roman Missal published in English since Vatican II. (The first edition was published in 1969 and the second edition in 1975.) In this new edition the Collect (opening prayer), dialogue responses, Preface, and Eucharistic Prayers have been adapted to be a closer translation to the Latin text. Also, the calendar of saints has been updated in light of the many holy ones canonized by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

In the Collect on this First Sunday of Advent we pray, "Grant your faithful *the resolve to run forth to meet Christ with righteous deeds at his coming. . . .*" It is as if we are asking God to help us in our resolution to be actively involved in Advent. So, at this first station of Advent we are called to be active in our awareness and responsive in our attitude.

Some focal points for reflection and prayer:

1. In light of the readings from the first Sunday of Advent:
 - a) From Isaiah 63, what in my life do I hold before God to mold and shape? What in my life does God want to mold and shape?
 - b) In 1 Corinthians 1, St. Paul acknowledges God's rich gifts among us all. What in my life do I acknowledge as a rich gift from God? What am I aware of as grace?

2. In light of Mary's words at Cana, "Do whatever He tells you," how is it, in light of my Baptism and Marianist commitment, that I am being called to give witness to the presence of the Kingdom of God?