



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Year A
December 12, 2010

Isaiah 35:1-6a
Jas 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

GATHERING

(An Advent wreath rests on a table covered with a rose colored cloth. Small containers of soil, along with herb seeds for each member are kept on reserve.)

We are called on this Third Sunday of Advent, not only to be alert to the signs of the times, but to rejoice in the waiting. Last week we looked at the important aspect of conversion that requires a *turning towards* God with a positive growth and deepening commitment manifested in deeds of love and justice. What positive steps did you take toward living more fully in right relationships this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(Three candles on the Advent wreath are lit as members are invited to be in touch with their yearning for God. A selection instrumental music plays while members sit in quiet. After a time, the prayer continues. To each invocation, members respond, "Come and save us, O Lord.")

Leader: O God, faithful One...

O God, securer of justice for the oppressed...
O God, giver of bread to the hungry...
O God, liberator of captives...
O God, opener of blind eyes...
O God, raiser of the downtrodden...
O God, protector of the homeless...
O God, sustainer of widows and orphans...

Member: Gracious God, You remind us that we are called to turn our attention to those in need. Help us to remember that the coming we await and pray for cannot overshadow how you come to us in the least among us. You are Emmanuel.

All: Amen.

Focus Question

- ◆ Recall a time when you were able to be the bearer of good news to someone who waited patiently for an answer.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

Exult, rejoice, sing! What an upbeat message Isaiah had for the people of Israel. The faith of these people rested in God's promise of a transformed world, a world in which all of creation would benefit. Not only would nature be restored to its primal beauty, but, even more so, those people perceived to be lacking in wholeness or completeness. All would sing and dance! They knew that God's saving power would not be found in the abstract. Their hopes were high and they looked to the *signs of the times*.

In the digital age, we are very familiar with the world of instantaneous contact. We have high expectations for immediate results. But is this really the *real* world? We try to force life in all of its varied manifestations to respond when we want, but, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that the best of life's accomplishments come only through patient waiting.

God does what the world thinks impossible, but in God's time! This is the message James sent to his people, to us. Be patient, make your hearts ready *through* and *in* the waiting. Just as the world of nature demands patient

waiting, so too, do our hearts. James encourages us to patient endurance sustained by our love and trust in God's promise.

In his own time of struggle and waiting, John was looking for answers. He questioned Jesus' authenticity! In his response to John, Jesus echoed the words of Isaiah telling him to look and see the signs. God is at work in Jesus.

In our day, earthquakes still happen, wildfires wipe out neighborhoods, wars leave widows and orphans. So, why do we rejoice on this Sunday in Advent? Because Jesus comes? Yes, but more precisely because he *has* come to be one with us. Emmanuel, the Word made Flesh has ushered in a new age. God is always and everywhere at work in our lives and in our world. The poverty, the hunger, the sorrow and the darkness we experience can lead to great flower and fruit if we are rooted in the soil of God's fidelity. See how our own lives mirror that of nature. "You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm." Seeds push through the soil, life emerges even through the snow. From seeming death new life comes. Just wait and see!

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ When has patience been required of you as the price for new life?
- ◆ What signs of God at work in your life and world are you in touch with these days?
- ◆ How well have you waited for breakthrough in times of doubt and darkness? What signs helped you through?
- ◆ What does the need for *patient waiting* ask of you now in your life?
- ◆ When and how have you been a visible sign of God's presence for another in need?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Make a donation of time or money to an organization that serves the needy in your area. In Hartford, get in touch with the House of Bread, 1453 Main St., 860-549-4188 or St. Elizabeth House, 118 Main St., 860-808-2120. In Waterbury, seek out the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen, 327 Baldwin St., 203-757-0411.
- ◆ Participate in the mission of a Catholic Worker House in your area. In Hartford, contact St. Martin de Porres House, 860-724-7066. In New Haven, get in touch with Amistad House, 203 Rosette St. Locate other

Catholic Worker Houses around the country at: www.catholicworker.org/communities. Click on Directory.

- ◆ Take sometime at the end of each day this week to reflect on how patient you were at times when you were called to wait.
- ◆ Engage in alternative gift-giving this Christmas. Contact an agency such as Heifer International, an organization that works to end hunger, empower families and nourish children. Go to: www.heifer.org for a gift catalogue.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to a time of quiet. After a minute of silence, the gospel of the week is re-read by a member of the community. Following the reading, the leader poses this question to the members: “What does Christ say to you/us in hearing this gospel today?” The community pauses for a full five to seven minutes of prayerful attention to how Christ speaks to them in this gospel. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two or a brief thought that captures what they hear Christ saying to them.

Following this sharing, members join in singing, “Await the Lord with Hope.” The song may be located on the Internet. When the song is complete, members pray as follows in two alternating groups.

I: We wait in Wonder
for skies to break open
for something to happen.

II: We read the signs in nature
and hear in our hearts
the echo that we are born
from apparent death.

I: As death comes in snow
so life comes in our winters,
as we wait in patient wonder for new signs.

II: We wait in wonder for another season of birthing
in wonder of the Word enfleshed in history,
in wonder of Mary’s “Yes.”

All: We stand in awe that the Word still lives today
speaking to our hearts,
waiting to transform us,
waiting to catch eternity in time. Amen.

Leader: May the blessing of Wonder continue to open our eyes and
hearts to the coming of Christ in our midst that we may truly
look and see.

All: Amen.

(The leader distributes the soil containers and seeds to each, encouraging member to nurture growth with attention and patient wonder.)

