

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Nov 29th 2015

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from ... the anxieties of daily life....” Luke 21

It's Advent! Too often, my first response might be to make a list of what needs to be done in the weeks ahead to prepare for Christmas. It is easy to feel anxiety about “getting it all done.” Or, we can pause and reflect on entering into Advent this year as a season with meaning. I know it will be a better season if I can re-adjust my expectations in a way that will bring me to Christmas Day with a closer relationship with God and a deeper connection to the nativity.

The readings for the First Sunday of Advent, this first day of the new liturgical year, begin with a hope and a reassurance: “The days are coming when I will fulfill the promise I made....”

That reading from Jeremiah was originally meant to encourage a people who were devastated by war, whose country was overrun and whose leaders had been taken away by the enemy. The Israelites were unsure of who they were and what they would become as a people. Jeremiah compares them to a forest that has been cut down, leaving no safety, no resources.

And to those people, God promises that out of that barren land, a tiny shoot, a small sign of life will appear on a lifeless stump: “I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land.” God goes on to promise them not only that Judah would one day be safe, but that Jerusalem would be secure. To those living back then, the promise would have seemed outsized and almost impossible, yet offering hope.

God's promise of safety, security and love is for me, too. The readings in the final weeks of Ordinary Time and the first weeks of Advent are meant to have us ponder the life we have today. How can I live that life? Am I wandering in my own desert aimless and confused? Or, do I really believe in my heart that God is here in my everyday life with me, helping me to be safe and secure?

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus, in his deep familiarity with the “end time” readings of the Old Testament, offers a vision of a world out of order. The sun and moon are no longer in alignment and the roar of the sea and waves terrify people. These readings don't frighten me but they do grab my attention, as if God is begging me not to be overwhelmed with what is out of order, but to pay attention to the promise, here and now.

Jesus talks about the anxieties of daily life and cautions us to “not become drowsy” from them. I know I have experienced anxiety in life over family, health and work. We can fret about everything from terrorism to our “To Do” list. But Jesus is offering us hope, consolation and his endless love. He tells us to pay attention at all times and to pray for strength. What he really wants is for us to know how very deeply each one of us is loved and cherished by him. I find this very consoling.

Relying on that love releases my fierce grip on control of my life. We can stop each morning, set aside our “To Do” list and pray. We can ask God to help us feel how deeply we are loved and to help us let go of things that really don't matter.

I am moved to turn to the words from today's First Letter to the Thessalonians, “May the Lord make

you increase and abound in love for one another ... so as to strengthen your hearts..." It's Advent!

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