

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Dec 2nd 2018

First Sunday of Advent

Anticipation. The readings on this first Sunday of Advent invite us to the feeling of anticipation. When I was a child the weeks before Christmas were a time of anticipation. The Christmas specials on TV were broadcast once a year and we were careful to not miss Rudolph or the Grinch. My siblings and I would pass around the Sears catalog that became well worn as we prepared our letters to Santa. The kitchen would be filled with the rich smells of baking Christmas cookies.

Each year my mother would gently remind us of the true meaning of Advent by inviting us to create a ‘Spiritual Crib for Baby Jesus.’ On the first Sunday of Advent she gathered the four of us around the table to each create our poster. We selected a nativity scene from a collection of last year’s Christmas card and generated a list of everything Baby Jesus would need such as a warm blanket and soft hay. Then next to each of the items for the crib we would commit to acts of kindness, service and generosity to prepare our spirits for the arrival of Baby Jesus.

Focusing on building our Spiritual Crib for Baby Jesus helped us keep the true meaning of Advent. The secular preparations for Christmas were still fun, but had the context of the birth of Jesus. And although sometimes we got competitive in our preparations, we always supported each other and often worked together on our acts of service. My mother created just the right balance for her children.

In today’s gospel from Luke Jesus reminds us how easy it is to get lost in the busy activities of December. He warns us: Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. Without prayer and embracing intentional stillness in the season of Advent it is so easy to feel as if the weeks before Christmas are racing by at a breathless pace.

When I hear Paul’s words to the Thessalonians, I am reminded of my mother inviting me to create a Spiritual Crib for Baby Jesus:

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.

Now as an adult I wonder how I can, this Advent season, build a Spiritual Crib for Baby Jesus. I pray for the strength to listen to those I do not want hear, to reorder my priorities to allow myself to be present to those who need some attention, to focus on serving another rather than simply ticking one more item off my to-do list, to act for justice in our community and in our world.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior,
and for you I wait all the day.

