

Homily for the First Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2008

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2b-7

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Matthew 13:33-37

I love this one line from today's first scripture reading:

*Would that you might meet us doing right,
that we were mindful of you in our ways.*

In other words,

Catch me when I'm having a good day, Lord!

In other words:

- *Stop by when I'm not wasting time on foolish things.*
- *Give me a call when I can tell you
that I'm so busy helping the poor I haven't got time to chat.*
- *Knock on my door
when I'm really paying loving attention to my family -
not yelling at someone because I'm tired or in a bad mood.*
- *Stop by my work place
when I'm saying something nice about a colleague,
not when I'm gossiping or talking behind someone's back.*
- *Bump into me when I'm on my way next door
to help my neighbor – the one I really don't like that much.*
- *Listen in on my conversation when I'm telling the truth,
speaking fairly, lifting someone's spirits,
giving an ear to someone's problems.*
- *Lord, stop by for some eggnog some night
when I'm really trying to remember
that Christmas is about you, and me,
and my neighbor near and far, and the world we live in –
and how we live the lives you have given us."*

In other words:

*Would that you might meet us doing right, Lord,
that we were mindful of you in our ways.*

Being a preacher in these weeks before Christmas can sometimes feel like shoveling sand against the tide, in the face of a virtual tsunami of sights and sounds, holly and hoopla, selling and spending, desires and disappointments, carols and cocktails, giving and getting and hoping and helplessness.

In the commercial and often in the Christian imagination, that jolly fellow from the North Pole seems, every year, to increase his favorability ratings while the carpenter from Nazareth slips lower in the polls,

even on his birthday.

When did you ever hear anyone ask on December 26th,
“Did Jesus come to *your* house?
Was Jesus *good* to you?
What did Jesus bring you?”

No one asks those questions – at least, not out loud.*

And so the preacher needs to stake out some ground
between sounding like Scrooge on the one hand
and completely capitulating to Santa Claus on the other.

This preacher will stand on a word of Jesus in today’s gospel:
Watch!

And I offer that word not so much as a warning or scare tactic.
Rather I offer it to you and to myself as a plea, as an invitation.

In this hurried, harried, holly-ed season:

- might we be vigilant and watch for Jesus
as children watch for Santa Claus?
- might we watch for Jesus with the earnest seriousness
with which we watch the ups and downs of the stock market?
- might we watch for Jesus as a mother or father
watch for a child to come home?
- might we watch for Jesus as people living in war watch for peace?
- might we watch for Jesus the way we look
for that special, beloved face
in the crowd of passengers getting off the plane?
- might we watch for Jesus with the wonder and anticipation we know
when opening a gift found under the tree with our name on it?
- might we watch for Jesus with eyes wide open
as when we marvel at the beauty of Christmas lights
or the sparkle of moonlight on fresh fallen snow?
- should we not watch for Jesus
as if our lives and our love and our hope
depended entirely upon his arrival, his coming into our lives,
his gifts, his mercy, his desire to be with us?

We don’t know just when or how or how often
Jesus will come to us this Advent.
But we can be sure he’s not waiting until December 25th
to make his presence known and felt in our hearts and minds.

He might come
in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow or in the morning.

Within moments he will come to this table, to sit and sup with us,
offering us the gift of his life in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Whenever he comes this Advent,
however he comes, wherever he comes,
may he *find us doing right, mindful of him in all our ways.*

What this preacher, then, says to all, and to himself, is this:
Jesus is at hand... He draws near...

Watch!

*After one Mas this weekend, a parishioner told me that,
indeed, in the Czech Republic Christians *do* ask each other:
"What did Jesus bring you for Christmas?"

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*