

From the Pastor's Desk

Where Are You Going?

We live in a world of microwave ovens and fast food. By the flick of the remote control or the click of a computer mouse, we immediately satisfy our desires. Our society is moving more rapidly as we gain command over more aspects of our environment. The cravings of the flesh can be quickly satisfied but the yearning of the human heart is more persistent. Christmas provides an opportunity to look into our hearts, but too often we are seduced by Wall Street and driven by desires gone wild.

In the midst of all this comes Advent, the four week season before Christmas when we are encouraged to patiently wait for the birth of Christ. In our culture, it is hard to wait for the Lord or anyone else for that matter. A few days before Christmas last year, I remember standing in a store check-out line. The man in front of me was impatient and said "Hurry up" to the lady in front of him. You could feel his impatience and rudeness, which caused tension in others. As the lady in front of him gathered her bags, she turned around, smiled and said "Merry Christmas" and walked away. While the man was busy with the external trappings of Christmas, the woman was working hard at internalizing Christmas in her heart.

One of the greatest gifts we can give others is patience and understanding. During Thanksgiving, we gave thanks to God for our many blessings and during Christmas we will be celebrating the birth of Christ. When we allow our schedules to drive us to the point that we lose patience and are rude to others, we contradict that which we celebrate and miss a divine appointment.

Advent is needed today more than ever. Our challenge in the midst of the external trappings of the holiday season is to internalize Christmas. Advent helps us to do this. During Advent God calls out to us: (From our Advent Confession and Forgiveness):

Pastor: "Wait... Be still... Where are you going? ...What's your hurry?"

Men: We have so much to do.

Women: Soon Christmas will be upon us. We have gifts to buy and people to see, not to mention our daily tasks at home and work.

Pastor: But, the Lord says again: "Where are you going?... Be still... Wait... What's your hurry?"

All: We find it difficult to slow down and allow our minds to be quiet.

Pastor: God speaks to us in the silence of our souls and calls us to remember what Christmas is all about. For a few moments, reflect: Where are you going? What are your priorities? Do you have room in your life for Jesus? ...

All: God of mercy, we confess that in our busyness we often ignore our souls. Being overly busy is a distraction from having to face our inner selves and our deeper fears. We find it difficult to silence the inner chatter and listen to your quiet voice in the depths of our hearts. This Advent season grant us the grace of inner peace and serenity. May we live our lives with an awareness of your presence in and around us.

Pastor: Sisters and brothers in Christ, God reaches out in compassion with healing and forgiveness. Know that in the most wounded corner of your being, you are loved and forgiven, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Thanks be to God!

Without Advent, Christmas is a blur. It can bounce along the top of our hearts as we watch it from a distance come and go. Advent calls us soften our hearts and enter into the mystery. It calls us to kneel before the crib and offer the greatest gift we have—ourselves. Without Advent, Christmas gets hijacked by Wall Street and our hearts remain barren and cold. Without Advent, people become impatient and checkout lines become painful.

This Advent season the Lord calls to you and to me, saying: “Where are you going?” “What are your priorities?” “Let it go ...” Together we pray: “Lord Jesus, without you life lacks meaning. Christmas becomes a preoccupation with things and a hassle we would like to avoid. Penetrate our hearts so we may feel compassion. Help us to live life from our hearts. Take away our anger and resentment. May we be the change we would like to see in our world. Amen.”

The First Sunday of Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year.

The Liturgical Calendar

This is the calendar we follow throughout the year. The liturgical cycle divides the year into a series of seasons, each with their own mood, theological emphases, and types of prayer, which can be signified by different ways of decorating churches, colors of paraments and vestments for clergy, scriptural readings and themes for preaching. In churches that follow the liturgical year, the scripture passages for each Sunday are specified by a list called a lectionary. Catholics, Anglicans and Lutherans have traditionally followed the lectionary, which originated in the during the first century of Christianity.

