

Advent 1A

With the first Sunday of Advent, the Church begins a new year. It does so, however, not with a bang, but with a brief period of reflection, a pause to meditate on Time – our time: the *saeculum*, the dimension we as creatures inhabit, the ‘here-and-now.’ Advent invites us to focus on the questions of where we are and where we are headed, “now, in the time of our mortal life.”

Today’s consumer culture has no ‘time’ for time; in fact it makes every effort to erase it from our consciousness. It cuts it up, divides it, portions it out, schedules it and plays with it, but in the end has no real use for it, because for today’s world, time is going nowhere, we are waiting for nothing, so time – as time – for us is empty.

This scares us. So we lurch from event to event like a dizzy socialite from party to party, terrified of being caught between events with ‘time on our hands’, “time to kill,” and ‘nothing to do’. Once Halloween is over – or Thanksgiving, depending on where you live – we just can’t wait for Christmas, so up go the lights and the trees, on come the carols and off we go to spend, spend, spend! And when there’s no party coming up, we plunge into our work, keep ourselves busy, busy, busy, lest we stop and become aware of time and its emptiness. For that emptiness is, we sense, the emptiness of death; the void, the great Nothing on which today’s consumer culture is ultimately founded.

Today’s readings present a different vision of time. Time here is not, a meaningless sequence of events and happenings that lead nowhere and mean, in the end, nothing, but rather it is the royal road leading us to the New Jerusalem of which Isaiah and the psalmist speak, the redeemed City of God to which the nations shall stream. There, at the end of our journey, when our feet are finally standing within those gates, we shall beat our swords (both literal and metaphorical) into plowshares, and all striving and struggle shall cease. Time has, in other words, an end, a purpose, a destination, and that destination fills all time with meaning – with hope, with light.

So Isaiah invites us to walk in the light of the Lord and Paul urges us to live “as in the day” because, as he says the night is already far gone, and that day is as good as here. And while Paul urges us to wake up, and get dressed, Jesus warns us to make sure we stay awake; that final day might dawn at any moment. The time of this mortal life here is a time of pregnant darkness, like that hour before dawn, where distant noises and the first hints of light foretell the coming of the day, the fulfillment of the promise: we are almost there, but not quite.

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This is the understanding of time that informs the life of Christians. And this is why in Advent, we prepare for the coming of the light; we rehearse the promise, we savor the hope, and we practice, as a community, the art of hopeful patience, the art of waiting grace-fully.

And, believe me, this hopeful waiting, this patience, is something we **have** to practice, because it stands in stark contrast to the way of the world around us. We have to un-learn the frenzied habits the world imposes on us, the endless search for gratification here and now, the frenetic motion as we move from activity to activity, that frantic need to forget, to deny time, kill time. And that is what Advent is for.

Of course, the minute we leave here and return to the world ‘out there,’ to the malls and the shopping centers, we will be confronted with the commercialized Christmas that has nothing to do with the dawn, the promise, the light that we are preparing for, and we’ve just got to live with that. But we should strive to try observe Advent in whatever way we can, because the habits of hopeful waiting, of patience, of real presence in the here and now, of attentive love, these habits that we strive to acquire during Advent are in the end, those on which the Christian life is built – they are *that* important. Because in a very real sense, Advent is the default season, so to speak, the season in which we are called to spend our lives, in this world, in this dimension, in this here-and-now.

And so I wish you all a fruitful Advent and a Happy Church New Year!

<p><u>NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:</u> Isaiah 11:1-10, Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 Romans 15:4-13, Matthew 3:1-12</p>	<p>December 18. •<i>Wedding, 2:00p.m.</i> •<i>Advent Lessons & Carols, 6:00p.m.</i></p>
<p><u>COMING UP:</u> November 28-30, December 1, 5-10, •<i>THEA nightgown inventory sale</i> December 02. <i>Wedding, 2:00p.m.</i> December 03. •<i>Norway Advent Service, 4:00p.m.</i> December 17. <i>Wedding, 2:30p.m.</i></p>	<p>December 24. •<i>Family Service, 4:30p.m.</i> •<i>Midnight Service, 10:00p.m.</i> December 25. •<i>Christmas Morning, 10:00a.m.</i> January 01, New Year. <i>Regular Sunday Schedule (7:30; 9:30)</i></p>

SAINTS:

Andrew the Apostle, Patron Saint of Scotland, 30 November. Though Andrew is named among the apostles in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, it is in John's gospel that most is learned about him. Andrew was a Galilean fisherman, mending his nets, when Jesus called him to follow him, which he promptly did. He then seems to have remained with Jesus until the end. He was there at the feeding of the five thousand and then later, when some Greeks in Jerusalem wanted to see Jesus, Philip brought them to Andrew who told Jesus of their desire. Tradition has him travelling on several missionary journeys and eventually being martyred by being crucified on an X-shaped cross. He became the patron saint of Scotland because of a legend that his relics had been brought there in the eighth century.

Charles de Foucauld, Hermit in the Sahara, 1 December. Charles Eugène de Foucauld was born in 1858 and led a dissipated life as a young officer in the cavalry. In 1883, he went on an expedition to Morocco where he developed a passion for north Africa and its ways. Four years later, he returned to the Catholic faith of his infancy and, after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, became a Trappist monk in 1890. Desiring an even more austere life, he left in 1897 and became a servant to the Poor Clares in Jerusalem and Nazareth. He was eventually ordained priest in 1901 and went to live as a hermit in Algeria, ending up at Tamarrasset. He became fluent in the local language and his care and concern for the local tribes-people made him accepted and then much loved, though he never sought converts. He composed Rules for brothers and for sisters, though none ever actually joined him. He was assassinated on this day in 1916, a victim of local religious wars. The Little Sisters of the Sacred Heart were founded in 1933, inspired by his rule for sisters. His writings also inspired René Voillaume and others to adopt a life based on his rule, eventually becoming The Little Brothers of Jesus in 1945.