

Third Sunday of Advent, Year A
Is 35:1-6a, 10
Ps 146: 6-10
James 5:7-10
Mt 11:2-11

Deacon Bob Cassey
St. Petronille Parish, Glen Ellyn
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“We wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

That is true every Sunday, week in, week out. But never more so than in the season of Advent.

We wait. Who is this “we”? It’s you and me. It’s the Church. It’s Christians everywhere, disciples who follow Jesus. It’s the people of God gathered in worship and prayer.

We wait. Waiting takes patience. In the field of project management, they talk about “man-months” (or at least they used to). With man-months, if you want faster results, you get more people working on your project. If a project takes 300 man-months, you can work 10 people for thirty days, or 15 people for 20, or 30 people for 10. But not every project can be reduced to man-months: some things can’t be hurried along. It takes one woman 9 months to bring a baby to term. You can’t speed a pregnancy along by having 9 women each take one month.

And so we wait, along with Mary, along with her husband Joseph, for the coming of Jesus. We recall how Jesus was born nearly 2,000 years ago, and we ponder how it is that in the birth of Jesus the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity came down from heaven and entered into human history and human culture. And we await the day when he will come again in glory to bring us and the whole rest of creation to fulfillment, and of his kingdom there will be no end. And we rejoice that in the meantime, while we are waiting, Jesus comes to us, in the Word of God, in the Sacraments, and in the Church.

We wait in joyful hope. Our joy is never complete, not yet anyway. And sometimes it’s hard to keep hoping. We suffer heartaches. Some of our relationships are broken. Others are ragged and frayed. Spouses become short-tempered. Parents and children bicker. // Our BFF betrays us, or – worse yet – we betray her, or we didn’t really betray her but she thinks so. // A child gets sick. // Or you’re reeling from a bad, a very bad diagnosis. // You hate your job. Or you love your job and you’re about to lose it because of a reorganization or, God forbid, a downsizing. // You’ve made what turns out to be a bad investment, and now your financial future appears to be in jeopardy.

So much pain, so much heartache, so much suffering.

We have a lovely practice here at St. Petronille, a practice that is not prescribed in the liturgy books. At the collection, we pass the basket around from hand to hand. Please,

even if you don't have an envelope or other monetary contribution to make, please take hold of the basket. As you pass it on to the next person, I invite you to place your struggles and your grief and your suffering into the basket. Whatever it is, put it in the basket. Your kid brother who drives you nuts, put him in the basket. The friend you haven't spoken to in a long time, put her in the basket. The boss whom you don't respect and who doesn't appreciate you, put her in the basket. The teacher who doesn't like you, put him in the basket. The neighbor you've been feuding with, put her in the basket. Your diabetes, your cancer, your rheumatism, your arthritis – put them all in the basket. The baskets will all get poured into one big basket, and folks representing you will bring them up to the altar in the offertory procession. There Father [Name] will lift them up with the bread and the wine and they will all be taken up into the loving hands of our heavenly Father, where Jesus will transform them all into his body and his blood.

Jesus comes to us, here, now, to say, "Don't be afraid. Don't give up hope."

A few years one of Chicagoland's finest preachers, Father Richard Fragomeni, came here to preach our annual parish mission. His topic was hope. One of the points Father Richard made, he drew a distinction between hope and optimism. The optimist believes that everything is going to turn out okay. But we know from experience that sometimes the outcome is very, very bad. Hope, however, is the assurance that however it turns out, . . . *however* it turns out, . . . is going to be okay.

In Advent we look forward to the Christmas season, and we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus." In the meantime we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.