

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
First Sunday of Advent, Dec. 1-2, 2018, Cycle C

There is an ancient story that depicts a man entering the gates of heaven. Once inside he discovers nothing but a place to sit facing a huge wall. When he asks his escort, St. Peter, for an explanation, Peter says, "You have entered the ante chamber of paradise. Paradise itself is on the other side of the wall. An opening in the wall will appear, but only once a year. It could emerge at any time: possibly in many months. Keep vigil and watch. If you miss it, your waiting will continue."

There is a striking similarity between our friend who waits in the ante chamber of paradise and ourselves. The story tells us that this man had entered the gates of heaven. Even though he sits in the ante chamber, waiting for the fullness of heaven to be revealed, our friend is already saved. We too by baptism are already saved. Baptism makes us brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus, living now in Jesus' Risen Life. Yet, we wait for the full revelation of our salvation. We wait for the final coming of Jesus, when even our mortal bodies will share in the Resurrection. So, in a very real sense we are in exile from the Lord, waiting in the ante chamber.

This season of Advent, we enter into with this Sunday, reminds us that the first coming of Jesus 2000 years ago in Bethlehem has everything to do with Jesus' final coming at the end of time. We might say that the end time itself began with the Incarnation of the Son of God in that stable 2000 years ago. Christ is God's final word to humanity: God began speaking His Word with the birth of Jesus, continues to speak His Word to the world until that time when He will finish speaking when Jesus comes in glory! The joy of Christmas, then, includes the anticipated joy of Jesus' final coming glory.

Like that man, then, sitting in the ante chamber of heaven, waiting for the opening in the wall to appear, Jesus encourages us to "be vigilant at all times." Jesus tells us: "do not become drowsy... from the anxieties of daily life..." We are to cultivate a state of vigilance during the time between the first coming of Jesus in the flesh, and His final coming in glory lest we miss the coming of the Lord not only at the end of time, but His coming into our daily lives.

How many wisdom figures in our faith tradition have insisted that God often comes to us now, but we easily miss God's daily comings because we do get absorbed with the anxieties of daily life? It is not easy to be alert, on the watch, vigilant when our lives are lost in the busyness of endless tasks and plans.

Advent, then, calls us to stillness, to silence, to prayer, to vigilance. Advent invites us to embrace a larger vision of the Incarnation – that Jesus was not only truly born 2000 years ago, but Jesus comes every day, and will come in glory. Advent draws us to prepare to live the mystery of the Word made flesh here and now. Life is Advent. Perhaps our daily reflection in this season can be this thought from the Old Testament Book of Sirach; "Trust in the Lord and wait for his light; for it is easy in the eyes of the Lord suddenly, in an instant, to make the poor rich" (SIR 11:21). We are poor, and we need to be made rich, but we can only be made rich, if we slow down, be patient, and become attentive to comings of the Lord.