

## First Sunday of Advent - C

I suppose we all had the experience of coming to the conclusion that we've been traveling in the wrong direction and need to make a change.

This could happen while driving in a car or riding a bike. It could also involve something more weighty, like a change in career path or lifestyle, or even some closely held beliefs.

In the season of Advent we come across readings that have a lot to do with the theme of changing direction. If the writers of our sacred texts had been given a direct path for carrying out God's plan they probably would never have seen the need to put pen to paper for future generations. Everything would have gone without saying.

For most, though, the turnabout they experienced prompted the passages we are reading during this season. Because God's plan was not obvious, some markers had to be laid down to point out the way.

Jeremiah, the author of today's first reading, is one of the exceptions. At this point in his ministry, he still believes that God will rectify the abuses he has encountered in the "normal" way: through the leadership of the one who sits on David's throne.

When the right king sits on the throne, things will change for the better.

Paul, on the other hand, has experienced a 180 degree directional change. He writes First Thessalonians for Gentiles, not for Jews he originally presumed he would be evangelizing.

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Instead of first converting the all Jews, then starting on the Gentiles, he has reversed the process. In this revised plan, once Gentiles are turned into other Christs, jealousy will prompt Jews to follow suit.

In a similar turnabout, Luke seems to be the first Christian writer to abandon the general belief that the risen Jesus will return in his lifetime.

He is convinced that the second coming will happen, but that it is going to take place while he is already enjoying heaven with Christ, not before.

That's why he is so insistent that his readers stay "vigilant." That unique event is still going to happen, even if it is not following its original schedule.

Luke wrote down his Gospel about 50 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Now it's been about 1980 years after than event. One of the challenges of today is still to remain vigilant and to look forward to the coming of the Lord.

It's not easy, which is probably why looking forward to the Lord's second coming does not play a very prominent role in most Catholic Christian's prayer life.

We are much more incline to seek the Blessed Virgin Mary's intercession "at the hour of our death" than we are to pray "Come, Lord Jesus."

Experience seems to be on our side. Passing from this life into the life of the world to come, one by one, has been the only way any one currently in heaven has gotten there.

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But there are good reasons not to give up on this central element of our faith. For one, it's what Jesus says is going to happen.

For another, if we hold fast to the Lord's coming in glory it helps us stave off the temptation to look at everything from an individualistic perspective. Jesus is not going to save just us and those we love. His plan includes the salvation of all.

That makes it much more difficult to write off this and that part of creation as unimportant or irrelevant.

All of a sudden, the second coming of Jesus makes us pay attention to all the things that need to be rectified. It gives us reason to hope that not just will my sins be forgiven, but that salvation will also include the "sin of the world," the sins that seem to have become built in from generations of injustice being done to peoples and nations and to the very earth itself.

I know from conversations with many of you that this way of thinking requires a change in direction. The church of Pope Leo the XII had to accommodate his teaching about the dignity of work and the dignity of workers. The church of Pope John the 23<sup>rd</sup> had to accommodate his teaching about the economic development of nations and the social justice required for that to happen.

And since Pope John Paul II environmental issues have been added into the central concerns of the church's mission to proclaim salvation to all God's creatures.

The awareness of all that God is about when it comes to

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saving the world continues to unfold in our awareness. It will require some adjustments. We have adjusted our thinking before, though, so this is not beyond our capabilities.

We can fold it into our Advent praying, “Come, Lord Jesus, Come” and stay vigilant for the impulse to change that expectant prayer brings with it.