

Scripture Reflection

November 29, 2009

My fellow parishioners:

Today we begin the season of Advent. Each Sunday during this time, we will offer you a brief reflection on the Gospel. I hope that it will help you to center yourself on God and his presence in life as we approach Christmas.

Have a blessed Advent.

Fr. Jim McDougall

+ A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke

Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish, distraught at the roaring of the sea and the waves. Men will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the earth. The powers in the heavens will be shaken. After that, men will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with great power and glory. When these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, for your ransom is near at hand.

"Be on guard lest your spirits become bloated with indulgence and drunkenness and worldly cares. The great day will suddenly close in on you like a trap. The day I speak of will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth, so be on the watch. Pray constantly for the strength to escape whatever is in prospect, and to stand secure before the Son of Man."

The gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTION

For most of us, patience just doesn't seem to be in our DNA. We want what we want when we want it – and usually, with enough money or bluster, we can get it.

But we may be missing something when things happen too quickly, too conveniently. Kathleen Norris, one of the most insightful spiritual writers of our time, in her book *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks and a Writer's Life* recalls:

"When I started using computers in the mid-1970s, I noticed that while the programs with which I kept the finances of several small businesses made my work easier, they also made me more impatient. I went from being grateful for how quickly new software could do the bookkeeping to snarling at the machine for being so slow. While I knew that my desktop Apple was many times more powerful than the first UNIVAC, which had filled a huge room in the 1950s, I failed to be grateful for the inventiveness and skill that made it possible. Instead, I

sighed each time I had to wait while the machine checked a record, made a computation, or saved to disk the work I had done.

"One day, when I timed one such annoying delay and found that it constituted all of ten seconds, I felt as if I had been slapped in the face and warned: *Pay attention – watch yourself.* And when I did, I saw an idiot groaning with impatience over a tiny increment of time. Technology had made a fool of me, for a few seconds of 'waiting' in computer time is no longer than seconds spent 'waiting' on a magnificent, rocky beach for the sun to rise over a pearl-tinted ocean; it is only my perception that makes them different. And how I perceive such things is a matter of spiritual discipline."

Advent is a spiritual "slap in the face" similar to what Kathleen Norris experienced at her computer. These four weeks before Christmas admonish us to stop and pay attention to the preciousness and fragileness of time. Advent teaches us not to master time but to embrace the flow of God's time, to realize that time is not an obstacle to be mastered but a gift to be cherished. Our lives are measured in a fixed, finite period of days, months and years that are not meant to be squandered on temporary and passing things. The spirit of Advent waiting enables us to hope, to behold God in every moment we live, to realize the possibilities to make things better and complete.