

First Sunday of Advent (B)

December 3, 2017

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

Psalm 80: 2-3, 15-16, 18-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

As I visited my friend incarcerated in a federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana, Eddie told me that it is very hard to get his hands on a calendar. He said that he would like to have a calendar, just to be able to know the day and to look forward to what might be coming. And so, I sent him a subscription for Give Us This Day which gives a monthly calendar and prayers for each day, each season. I then found this one page calendar for 2018 and I sent that along as well. There is something about being anchored in time, and I would say, there is great comfort in being able to dream and anticipate.

From time to time, most of us yearn for a new beginning where we leave the past behind. As I read the newspaper each morning, I often think how wonderful it would be to end our relationship with the hatred, the violence, the injustices, and to make a total new beginning. I am sure there are many public figures and members of the US Congress who would like to leave their past behind and make a fresh new beginning. Yet, we are each a part of *time and memory*, there is no walking away from the past. My friend in prison carries his past with him, you and I carry our past with us. Our past helps us, in the sense, that we can see more clearly where we are and where we are called to be. There is a great difference between *where I want to be* and *where I am called to be...* The difference lies in my willingness to listen and work with that loving God who called me into existence, that loving God who called you into existence.

This is the First Sunday of Advent and a new year, a new liturgical season. The sacred word opens with a lament on behalf of the people of Israel... You might say *it is a complaint* but it is so much more. Returning home from exile in Babylon, Israel found their land and their city of Jerusalem in ruins. They truly felt abandoned by their ancestors and even abandoned God. For these returning exiles, hope was inconceivable. This lament is a recognition of the past where Israel had sinned and disappointed God. Yet surprisingly, it seems to turn on God. It blames God when it asks, "Why did you let this happen? You have hidden your face from your people."

This lament that covers a number of chapters is dynamic, it has movement. The prophet Isaiah intercedes on behalf of a suffering people. He begs the Lord to open the heavens and come down. "No longer hold back but make your presence known upon the earth." Proclaiming the anguish of a suffering people, Isaiah quickly turns and expresses hope in the willingness of God to intervene. "O God, you are our Father and our Mother, we are the clay, you are the potter. We are the work of your hands." Isaiah knows God can form this people again, making them beautiful even beyond past expectations.

This Advent Season begins with a word that invites us to ponder Israel, our ancestors in faith, to reach back *in time and memory*, to see what we might learn. *Turn, be watchful, be*

alert! Focus on the Lord and listen! With the Lord we recognize how much the world and our own lives are in need of transformation. With the Lord we dream and begin to imagine what this world and our lives will look like when God's reign is fully revealed. We dream of a world without terrorism, a world without oppressive rulers, a world where nations refuse to house any nuclear weapons. We dream of a world where we respect one another and refuse to intimidate or belittle others to get our own way. We dream of work places free of hidden agendas, free of abuse, free of manipulation. We dream of a time when weapons will only be used appropriately, never to harm another human being, even in war. "O Lord, you are our father, we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands." As we humbly dream with the Lord, we are no longer focused on *where we want to be* but *where we are called to be*.

This new day, this new beginning, this Advent Season is an opportunity to calm our anxious lives and open the door of our hearts. The human and the divine must come together for this world and this human family to know its fullest potential. Our coming together this morning, our prayer and celebration of Eucharist enables us to know God's deep desire to share our human lives. May we enter this new week hope-filled, in the deep presence of God that is forming us!