

First Sunday of Advent 2023 B

Take a moment to think of something that has gone out of your life in the past year. It might be something you owned, or a change of jobs, or maybe someone who has moved away; or most significantly, a loved one who has gone home to God. Mindful of the change that visits every life, the Church prays today:

“Even now, as we walk amid passing things, you teach us by them to love the things of heaven, and hold fast to what endures.” Those words from today’s Prayer after Communion also invite us into the inner meaning of the Eucharist – where the passing things of bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the greatest things of Heaven – and we are drawn more deeply into God’s life that will endure forever.

Passing things. Advent collides with the hectic pace of the weeks before Christmas, and the busy days fly by. Advertisers entice us with passing things, urging us to replace what we have with the latest, the newest, the best. Perhaps we are reminded of Christmases past, with people and places no longer present, or when peace was not so fragile and life seemed more settled. ***We know passing things quite well.*** Amid all the restlessness and uncertainty of change, Advent invites us to think and rest and pray, to wait with stillness and greater silence, to keep watch and long for the presence of God.

In the turmoil of our anxious world, watching the news and reading the headlines makes us understand those words of Isaiah, valid in every generation: ***“O God, that You would rend the heavens and come down! Why do you let us wander? Where are those awesome deeds we could not hope for?”*** And as today’s Psalm prays: ***“Make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.”***

And yet, the world goes on. Every year, we listen to the same readings, we observe the hope of Advent ... and sometimes it seems that nothing really changes for the better, that God hides His face. Sin and suffering and death remain with us, and even our best efforts can seem empty. We can so easily abandon

ourselves to passing things and no longer caring much about those things that endure. All the more do we realize that such passing things cannot ground our hope.

It was Mary who first experienced God's answer to that age-old desire – *literally to look upon the face of God in her Son Jesus*. The Lord HAS rent the heavens and come down ... but in a way we could not have imagined or hoped for. God now has a human face, for He has come not in overwhelming power but in the weakness of a newborn Child; not in fearful signs and force but in the one way that ultimately shapes history and the future – the way of self-emptying love, still at work through the Church, called to show that Face of mercy and hope to the world.

Advent this year will itself be one of those quickly passing things ... in three weeks it will be Christmas Eve. So make it count. Cultivate silence when possible in a noisy time as you can, and make room of the peace silence can bring. Spend at least a bit more time in stillness and prayer and ponder how those passing things you remembered a couple of minutes ago have drawn you closer to God. Do an intentional act of kindness each day. Make peace with someone where distance has grown. This Advent, as we await the return of Jesus at the end of time, be on the watch for Christ to come to you now in some unexpected person, some unforeseen way. *For even now, as we walk amid passing things, God can teach us by them to love the things of heaven, and hold fast to what endures.*