

First Sunday of Advent 2020 B

“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 are part of the Prayer after Communion for this First Sunday of Advent, pointing us to 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 what sustains us now and endures forever.

Passing things. We usually mark Advent during the hectic pace of the weeks before Christmas, although this year everything is upended by COVID. Still, 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. ***We know passing things quite well.*** If you feel a kind of spiritual restlessness with turmoil of our days since last Advent, a longing for some time to think and rest and pray, then Advent is just in time, inviting us to wait, to hope, to keep watch and long for the presence of God.

In our troubled and unsettled 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. All the more do we realize that passing things cannot be our hope. We want some sign that God has heard us and will come down with awesome deeds ... that God will ***let us see His face so we can be saved*** – saved from hopelessness,

from giving up on goodness, from abandoning ourselves to passing things and no longer caring about those things that endure.

It was Mary who first experienced God's answer to that ancient prayer – *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 hoped for. We now can see God with 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 will go by quickly, so make it count. Spend more time in stillness and prayer; do an intentional act of kindness each day; make peace with another. 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.