

Sunday Nov. 29, 2020

## **First Sunday of Advent: *Waiting in Hope***

*By: Mary Bastedo*

Our capacity for waiting has been tested this year - by the pandemic which is dragging on for months and by the renovations to our church which have taken over two years. "Restore us, O God!" we cry with the psalmist. How we long to be restored - to having dinners, Bible studies and bake sales in our parish hall, to spilling outside after mass for coffee with fellow parishioners, to singing during mass with a choir and instruments, to family celebrations where we can sit elbow-to-elbow and hug and kiss one another. How we long to be restored! Yet, we are called to wait.

As we begin Advent together there is much we can learn about *how* to wait. We wait for the One who will enter into our humanity - our hearts, our minds, our daily lives - in every detail. We wait for Jesus the Saviour of the world. We wait in expectant hope. Advent gives us a focus for our waiting. The prophet Isaiah assures us that God is working in those who wait. It need not be an empty, frustrated waiting; our waiting can be pregnant with God. Mary teaches us about waiting in hope and trust. Though she lived many challenges and trials during her pregnancy Mary's heart was focused on God's promise, which she pondered in the depths of her heart.

"Stay awake," Jesus says. Don't fall asleep in the waiting. Be attentive to how God is working. What are the gifts that are being offered during this time? A closer relationship through virtual communication with a friend who is far away? A deepening sense of inner quiet since I am not being pulled in so many directions? Finding new ways of cooperation and intimacy with my family and spouse? Learning to work through conflicts? New creativity? A new awareness of addiction or bad habits? How is God working in me through all of this?

We are seeing stark social inequities throughout this pandemic. Are we awake to this? How is God calling us to greater solidarity and compassion for others? In his new encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis encourages us to be engaged in "social friendship." A social friendship is one that does something to mend our social fabric - friendship that builds bridges, heals division, brings hope; friendship that includes those who are often excluded and on the margins....like refugees, widows, orphans, the poor. Am I being called to reach out to someone

in social friendship during this time of Advent? Focusing on others makes the waiting a graced time, a time that is pregnant with God.

Some simple habits of prayer during Advent can help me keep alert to how God is present and is inviting me to deeper faith. An offering of my day in the morning and a short time of reflection in the evening can attune me to the action of God's grace and help me live this time of waiting with hope and trust.

St. Paul assures us that God will give us all the spiritual gifts we need to live this time of waiting well. God will strengthen us to the end. God is faithful.