Opinion
Spirituality



A man enjoys a meal at a soup kitchen in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Oct. 4. (CNS/Agustin Marcarian, Reuters)



by Thomas Gumbleton

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 5, 2019

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint
Soundcloud

As is very clear from our readings today, this season of Advent is a season when we are called to be alert. It's a season where we're expecting the coming of Jesus. In some ways, as the Gospel describes it, we might think of it as a fearsome time. But it's not really; it's a time for joy, a time for hope, a time for the fullness of the coming of God into our lives. Advent, the word itself, means coming, coming to us.

First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2019

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

Generally, we think of it in three ways of how Jesus is coming to us. First of all, yes, at the end of time, Jesus will return to draw all of us into a fullness of life and joy and the reign of God is present in its fullness. A time like Isaiah described in our first lesson where there will be war, never again. People will not be violent to one another. We will not have killings on our streets and in our cities and in our country and around the world.

It will be a time, as Isaiah says, when swords will be turned into ploughshares, no weapons, no war—peace, fullness of life. It certainly will be a time to look forward to. But also in the meantime, Advent is a time when we look forward to celebrating the first coming of God into our human family. We might wonder why we need to have a special awareness of this. We're looking forward to the celebration in four weeks of the birthday of Jesus, the Son of God as part of our human family. We've been doing that every year for how many years for some of us — many.

We might think that we almost don't need that. Of course we'll be ready to celebrate the memory of the birth of Jesus, but I think maybe not. It's almost like we take it for granted. We don't really have the deep awareness of how extraordinary it is that God, the creator of all that is, comes into our human family. I think St. Paul had a very vivid awareness of what that meant. Do you remember that he did not accept Jesus at first. He was a convert and he had to come to realize the importance of the birth of Jesus as one of us.

In one of his letters, the Letter to the church at Philippi, St. Paul spells out what it means that God has become part of our human family. He says, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though he was God, emptied himself, took on human form, even gave himself over to death, the ignominious death of the cross. (God emptied himself to become one of us.) Therefore, he is raised up again in the fullness of love."

God, undergoing an emptying out, in a sense, of his own nature to take on our human nature, to be one with us at every moment of our lives, to be the way, the truth and the life. God comes into our world, into our human family, into our history. We look forward to that and celebrate, I hope with a deeper awareness as we pray throughout Advent for that awareness of how important, how extraordinary, how almost unbelievable is this mystery that God becomes one of us.

Of course, part of the reason for that is so that he can show us the way, show us how to live, show us how to make happen the good things that make our life joyful, happy, full of praise and hope. Jesus shows us. But then there's also a third thing that Jesus reminds us of himself later in his life when he talks about how he comes to each of us — if we're alert, at almost any time — in other people. "When I was hungry, you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was in prison, you visited me. When I was homeless, you took me in. When? Whenever you did it to one of the least of your brothers and sisters, you did it to me."

Jesus can come into our life any day, any moment, but we have to be alert and we have to be ready to welcome him in whatever way, whatever guise he comes to us. It's easy to miss those comings that happen almost every day. People are desperately in need and we need to remind ourselves that Jesus, who became part of our human family, identifies himself with those people and asks us to welcome him by welcoming them, reaching out in love and care.

Advertisement

In all of these three ways during this season of Advent, we want to try to be more alert to the coming of Jesus, to the coming of Jesus in everyday life, to the special celebration of his coming into human history at Christmas, and then to his return at the fullness of time when he will come to make the reign of God happen. I invite you to listen once more to how Isaiah describes that marvelous time that we can look forward to.

> The vision of Isaiah concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the last days, the mountain of God's house will be set up as the highest mountain and will tower over the hills. Then all nations will stream to it. Many people will come and say, "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that God may teach us God's ways, and we may walk in God's paths."
>
> The teaching will go forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and settle disputes for all peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not raise swords against nations. They will learn warfare no more. Oh house of Jacob (God is addressing all of us), Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

We must try to do that in a special way during this season of Advent so that we help to bring about the fullness of life that God promises to us that we await will happen at the end of time.

Editor's note: *This homily was given Dec. 1 at St. Ambrose Church, Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.*