

First Sunday of Advent  
November 30, 2003

By Father Charles Bowes

Luke 21, 25-28, 34-36

## *We Christians still wait and while waiting we care and we celebrate.*

The presence of a couple pregnant with the future, waiting for a birth dramatizes not only Christmas, but the entirety of the Christian life. I want to thank our "Jesus and Mary" people who are with us at Mass this weekend to bring home the point of anticipation and expectation so characteristic of us.

The early Christians - the first and second generation followers of Jesus - waited for Him to return in judgment over the earth, as He had promised. They came together to recount the stories of His life among them, and wrote them down so that the stories would not be forgotten. They remembered what Jesus had said: that He would die, and rise up again in three days - and this had come to pass. If that was true, then everything else He said was true too. Like feeding and sheltering the poor. Like loving one another.

The early Christians remembered that Jesus had said, "This good news of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a witness to all the nations. Only after that will the end come."

His followers thought the end wasn't far off. Jesus would come back in glory to judge the living and the dead. Believers, and all who had been persecuted, would get their just desserts; that evildoers would be cast into

the outer darkness. It wouldn't be long.

But year by year, the followers of Jesus became accustomed to the idea that perhaps the coming of the Son of Man at the end of time would take a little longer than they had thought at first. And still they waited.

While they waited, they tried to live as He had taught them. They cared for the poor, fed the hungry, sheltered the homeless. They remembered how the Messiah himself, the Son of God, had been born a helpless child, dependent on others for survival. And still they waited.

They grew old; they died. Some succumbed peacefully to old age, with their families around them. Some died horribly in war. Taken as slaves, others died for the amusement of their captors in the Roman Coliseum. Followers of Jesus died under unflagging persecution. With their lives, they proclaimed, daily, the loving message of Jesus. And still they waited.

A hundred years passed, and another hundred, and another. The Church became powerful and influential, intolerant of any other faith. Those who did not believe were tortured, burned at the stake, forced into exile, all in the name of Jesus, the Lord.

Even so, there were those who worked tirelessly for peace, sheltering the poor and feeding the hungry. There were those who walked humbly in foreign lands,

proclaiming the good news by their quiet joy and radiant faith. God's word spread through their actions as well as through their words. And still, still they waited.

We who live in this fast-paced, modern world find it difficult to wait for even a few minutes, much less for weeks or months or years. We complain that anti-terrorist precautions now make it necessary to get to the airport two hours before our flight, to stand in line and wait to be screened. We're not good at waiting. We want what we want, and we want it now.

Year after year, God keeps showing us that our impatience has nothing to do with God's time. The irony is that the longer we wait, the faster time goes. To a two year old child, a year is half a lifetime. A young man almost explodes with frustration waiting until he's old enough for his driver's license. At the other end of his life, he sadly gives up his car keys because he can no longer drive safely - how did this happen so soon? To a grandmother, a year goes whizzing busily by, until she thinks, "Goodness, it's almost Christmas again so soon!"

God's time is not our time. What we cherish vanishes too quickly. What we abhor or hate hangs on and on. What we wait for seems remote and unattainable. And still we wait, still trying to do what Jesus taught us to do: feed the poor, shelter the homeless, protect children, live in peace.

Deep in our hearts, we know that He who lives among us could return in glory tomorrow. What will we say to Him? Will we have time to welcome Him?

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