

The following reflection was delivered at a parish retreat by Sr. Joan Guertin

Advent A Time Of Waiting

Advent is the season of waiting. In the hymns and readings of the Advent season the Church tries to create for us the longing and the desire of the Jewish people for the advent of the Messiah. What is your favorite Advent hymn? What hymn do you associate the most with Advent? Advent wouldn't be Advent for me if we didn't sing O Come. O Come Emmanuel. O Come, O Come Emmanuel LONGING. Rejoice, Rejoice Emmanuel. Shall come to you O Israel. JOY. The refrain frames well the mystery and the spirituality of waiting; the longing and the joy of the season.

Waiting is supposed to be joyful? You might say the song writer has never experienced a traffic jam or an Emergency Room. In those instances we have the longing, but not the joy. "Emmanuel shall come to thee..." Hasn't Jesus already come; so, isn't it a little like make believe to ask him to come? Karl Rahner answers that question well. "It is said that You will come again, and this is true. But the word again is misleading. It won't really be 'another' coming, because You have never really gone away. In the human existence which You made Your own for all eternity, You have never left us. But still You will come again, because the fact that You have already come must continue to be revealed ever more clearly. It will become progressively more manifest to the world that the heart of all things is already transformed, because You have taken them all in Your heart."

The mystery of waiting is rooted in the heart of our God. Who is the God we await? Or should we say the God who awaits us. It is a God who is infinitely patient and creative. God chose to create an evolutionary world. A world in process. God's "let it be" ushered in a universe still in the making. In 2022 how many civilizations have come and gone? How many species have evolved or become extinct? How many sunrises and sunsets have occurred? And God waits. One of my favorite passages in the Old Testament is Chapter 38 in the Book of Job. If you want a glimpse of our creator God read it. Here is just a short excerpt. "Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who stretched out the measuring line for it? And who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling bands? Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place? Has the rain a father; or who has begotten the drops of dew? Have you fitted a curb to the Pleiades, or loosened the bonds of Orion? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens; can you put into effect their plan on the earth?" Job didn't have an answer, nor do we in the face of our Creator God, our infinitely patient and creative God.

When we talk about the evolution of the universe we are talking about billions and billions of years and still counting. Waiting seems to be endemic with our creator God. Genesis gives us the story of creation and Revelation the last book in the Bible brings the original story to its fulfillment. Revelation 21:1-4 "Then I saw new heavens and a new earth. The former heavens and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer. I also saw a new Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride prepared to meet her

husband. This is God's dwelling among humans. He shall dwell with them and they shall be His people and He shall be their God who is always with them. He shall wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, or mourning, crying out or pain for the former world has passed away." Genesis the creation of the universe, Revelation the fulfillment of creation. When we might ask? The question is and has always been when. The early Christians separated from us by over 2000 years thought it was going to be in their life time. How many cults have predicted the day and the time and yet we are still here. We wait and God waits. When we talk about the mystery of waiting that is what we are talking about. Waiting is in the heart of God. The waiting that is in the heart of God is creative. It is not suicidal or pessimistic. It is creative, life giving and life enhancing. Is our waiting creative, life giving, life enhancing?

When God chose to come into our world in human form God did not circumvent the world God had created. Rather Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb because Mary said Yes to God. We have an article in our rule of life that states, "Mary's 'Yes' at the moment of the Annunciation was a whole-hearted response to the Father's plan." What is God's plan? A large part of God's plan is to respect the free will God gave us. God asked Mary, He did not coerce her. Stop and think for a moment. If you had brought this beautiful universe into existence, would you entrust it to a creature who can say yes to furthering its beauty and grandeur or could say no and set into motion decisions and choices that would endanger its viability? And God waits.

God waits for us to appreciate the beauty of this universe, God waits for us to enter into the vision of the Book of Revelation for a new heaven and a new earth. And God waited for a fourteen year old girl to give her consent before being conceived. Waiting is in the heart of our God. It is creative, life giving, life enhancing.

Once Jesus is born He waits thirty years before beginning His public ministry. Our God in Jesus spent thirty years much as we do every day. Living a life that is not all that spectacular. Working as a carpenter in a small town in Galilee. Living the life of an ordinary person. What a waste of talent our culture would say. Once He does begin His public ministry with whom does He associate? Twelve rather dense fishermen, lepers, sinners, tax collectors, not a very good career move our culture would say.

Yet what Jesus is about is the vision of Revelation, a new heaven and a new earth. That new earth was experienced by the lepers, who were cured, and the adulterous woman who was forgiven. Jesus was showing us how this new earth was to be created, what it should look like. From the time of Jesus to today many of the illnesses that were fatal then have been eradicated because of the advances in science. And yet we still wait, wait for more advances as does our God. I don't think the new earth is what Ukraine or Chad or even Jesus' homeland should look like and we wait, as does our God.

Jesus's life was a model of forgiveness, healing, acceptance of others in other words Jesus' life was creative, life giving, life enhancing. Am I in my world creating that new earth that is creative, life giving, life enhancing?

Earlier I mentioned that waiting was a mystery. Why is it a mystery? Because it is found in the heart of our God and God is mystery. Can we fully understand or comprehend God? If we stop

and ask ourselves where have all the hours of waiting that we have experienced gone is that not also a mystery? Where are they? Where have they gone? What have they accomplished? Have they been creative, like giving, life enhancing?

These questions lead us into the spirituality of waiting. How do we wait? How does a pregnant woman wait for nine months? If all is well with the fetus she no doubt waits with eagerness, anticipation and love. If it is a difficult pregnancy she might wait with anxiety, vigilance and hope. Why do I use that example? Because two very important Advent figures are Mary and Elizabeth. Both are pregnant, but their waiting differed perhaps. Elizabeth an elderly married woman who finally becomes pregnant after many years of waiting. Mary a teenager not yet married. How do they wait? Luke tells us that as soon as Mary says her Yes to God she leaves for Ain Karim to minister to her elderly cousin, who no doubt ministered to her young and perplexed cousin. They waited together. Elizabeth sharing her wisdom and trust in God and Mary sharing her innocence and faith in God. For waiting to be fruitful it must be rooted in God which makes it creative, life giving, life enhancing.

During Advent many of the readings are from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah's visions of what the world would be like once the Messiah came We are all familiar with "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. The wolf shall be a guest of the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. The calf and the young lion shall browse together with a little child to guide them." The little child came in Jesus of Nazareth. Our God came as a child not as a powerful leader, who could enforce his control over others. And even to this day waits for our response.

As Americans we are not, as a whole, good waiters. We live in a culture of instant communication, drive through lanes, instant coffee, twenty somethings becoming millionaires. Waiting is a waste of our time. Yet our God waits. Waits for our Yes to God's plan for the universe, waits for us to become the person God wants us to be, waits for us to help create the new earth. So the question becomes. How do we wait? What do we wait for? Is our waiting creative, life giving, life enhancing?

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