

E-Chronicle: December 2013, The Season of Advent

Aloha my Sisters and Brothers,

The Diocese is truly into "The Season" with the commemoration of the Feast of the Holy Sovereigns, Thanksgiving, Advent and then Christmas. Holiday concerts and parties are taking place around the Diocese. While I pray we can give time to offer thanks this Holiday Season and can find opportunities for gracious fellowship and personal joy, I hope we will also have the opportunity during Advent to consider well the vision of the Kingdom of God in the lessons on Sundays during the month of December.

On the First Sunday of Advent (December 1), Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Romans (13:11-12), that our relationship with God is immediate: "You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near." In Matthew's Gospel (24:36, 42, 44), Jesus says to the disciples, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.... Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

On the Second Sunday of Advent (December 8), we again read from Paul's Letter to the Romans (15:4-9). Here Paul encourages the believers to live together in diversity: "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." In Matthew's Gospel (3:1-2, 4, 11), we will again be introduced to John the Baptist. "In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near....' Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey." He comes, however, announcing another: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

As we move to the Third Sunday of Advent (December 15), we will be reading from the Letter of James (5:7-10) and like Paul he too speaks to the gathered community: "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient.

Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” And again, we meet John the Baptist (Matthew 11:2-6). He is now in prison. “When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.’”

On the last Sunday before Christmas (Advent 4: December 22), we again hear from Paul (Romans 1:1-7): “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Finally, we have a story about the birth in Matthew 1:18-21: “Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’”

During Advent, we are called to look to the future and the promise of the Kingdom of God – the time of justice, peace and love. We do that by being called to examine how we live today. Are we living before God every moment of our lives? Further, do we live in a community of faithful inclusion without judgment, rancor, self-centeredness or anger? Do we help create a community of justice and love? John the Baptist connects the vision of the future in the person of Jesus Christ. Finally, as we look to Christmas and the Feast of the Incarnation, Paul boldly affirms “Jesus Christ our Lord” connecting the entire story of salvation to the Church in Rome and, therefore, to the story of salvation to the Church in Hawai’i. Matthew prepares us for the story of the Nativity, but only insofar as it points us to the promise of new life and Easter.

Perhaps this Advent we can look around to find a glimpse of the true Kingdom – the place of acceptance and God’s love. The place where we can stand with our hands and hearts open, and declare: “See, the Judge is standing at the doors!” and it is good.

A story recounted from a recent run of the A Cup of Cold Water Van on Maui: A run leader shared that a client in Lahaina asked, "What are you people selling?" The reply was "Nothing, we are giving food, water, clothing and stuff.... things you might need." The client a bit

surprised: "Wait, you are here to help us?" The volunteer simple answer: "Yes". The client: "Nobody came here to help us, nobody."

When we have eyes to see, the Kingdom breaks upon us every day. The Advent of the Prince of Peace is upon us when "... the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense." Take your time this Advent. Give thanks and give. The promise of Christ has its meaning in today and looking to the unfolding of what is to come.

Be assured of my prayers for you and for a most holy Advent.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko mākou Haku,

+Bob

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick

+ Keali'ikoaokeakua