

December 1, 2019

Isa 2:1-5; Rom 13:11-14; Mt 24: 37-44

I was telling Fr. Miguel about the mission trip I took to Guatemala several years ago. One day we were going to be going to a village in the mountains. Now, in this area the people are very devout in their faith - yet they only get a chance to participate in Mass about once a month. Well today our group of seminarians, a deacon, and a few priests was going to visit. We heard later that they had made an announcement to the village that priests were coming - so we will have Mass! When we arrived, the people from the surrounding villages and from the rural mountain areas had streamed into the village. The church had been decorated, there were candles in paper lanterns lining the path from our bus to the church doors, and everyone was dressed up. Although it would have been flattering to think that they went to all this trouble because of us, that wasn't really it - they prepared and they came from the mountains to meet one person who would be showing up in that Church - Jesus Christ.

During the season of Advent, the Church calls us to be more aware of the reality of the great gift that God has given us by coming to be among us as Jesus Christ. We can so easily forget the privilege of being able to meet God in the flesh during our Eucharist, we can become so lulled by the invisible presence of God in the world that we begin to forget that God is there. Thinking about the people streaming in from the mountains of Guatemala to meet Jesus I am reminded of our first reading: *The mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. ... many peoples shall come and say: Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain ... For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.* At the thought that the Lord himself was coming, the villagers sought his presence, they sought the instruction they would receive, they wanted to be reminded again that their God - while invisible - was very much real and was supporting their rough existence in many ways. We can learn a lot from them.

People here in this church now have hopefully come to meet the Lord, but so many of our brothers and sisters do not even come to this privileged celebration. If they were here, the villagers would be excited to know that not only could they go to Mass every Sunday, but also that they could go during the week as well. Sometimes what we have so much of, we can take for granted. Advent calls us to step back and make ourselves aware of the fact that God entered

our world in time and became flesh so that the invisible God would be present with us in a new and different way. Advent calls us to look ahead to the commemoration of Christmas and realize that as the villagers waited in expectant hope for a bus to arrive in their village we look forward to recalling the event that brought Jesus into our time - and we also await the coming of Jesus into our lives in a new way each year - a coming that offers us some important opportunities.

We will return to that thought in a minute, but let us look at why we can lose sight of the great gift, why we can be so unaware of the invisible presence of God, why we can be unaware when we are in the presence of his very flesh and blood. Perhaps the reason for losing sight of God is that our attention is so focused elsewhere. Certainly at this time of year we are distracted by many things. I was at the mall on Black Friday (yes I know maybe not the safest thing I have done ... but I like to live dangerously). There were all kinds of lights blinking, all kinds of signs drawing you into stores - and more people streaming around than I had seen in many months. What were they all coming to see? What were they all coming to do? Why doesn't the Lord get this kind of attention? Maybe it is because we are so well provided for that we look less to the Lord, and we are so surrounded by glitz and electronic stimulation that we miss the signs of his presence. We are distracted by the consumer culture, we are so distracted by our own needs, we are so distracted by shiny things. The distractions of the world and of our own bodies can absorb attention that we should be putting to God. St. Paul says in the second reading: *Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ... put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.* Let us throw off the desires of the flesh, the desires for things, the desires for comfort, the desires to try to be the master of our time - and give more of that time and energy to God.

There is a great opportunity being held out to us in Advent. We prepare to meet the Lord in his birth, and prepare to meet him in our lives. When we celebrate the birth of Jesus we open ourselves to see how God can become a bit more real and enfleshed in our lives in the coming year. We contemplate a baby in a manger - born and able to be held - and we can contemplate the presence of Jesus that can be born to us anew during the Christmas season. To have that happen we need to prepare and to wait. Such an encounter may come at any time during this season - or maybe in a season yet to come. But we must remain ready because we don't know when he will come and we don't want to be distracted on that day. As Jesus says: *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. ... So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.*