

Watch and Wait

First Sunday of Advent (Year B)

November 29, 2020

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We have been waiting for months for the coronavirus pandemic to end. Many of us are fatigued, tired of the restrictions, and ready to move on. I'm sure you also heard some complaints about our officials telling people not to visit family for Thanksgiving. While the end to all of this is hopefully in sight, we have to wait a little longer.

The necessity of waiting without growing weary is the theme of the season of Advent, which starts today. During these next four weeks, we will practice our ability to wait. Like the gatekeeper in the Gospel waiting and watching for the return of the master, we too have the important, yet mostly uneventful job of waiting and watching for the Lord. As we know from experience, the waiting oftentimes drags on.

Waiting doesn't come naturally to many of us. While the inability to wait is understandable in a child, it is less understandable for an adult. Waiting is something that we must practice or we will never learn it. As Christians, perhaps our greatest way to practice waiting is to pray. In prayer, we learn to wait upon the Lord. If we can wait upon the Lord in prayer, we can wait upon anything.

The German Jesuit priest and theologian Karl Rahner wrote about having this prayerful disposition in his book *Encounters with Silence*. In his chapter, 'God of My Prayer,' Rahner wrote this to God: "the prayer that you require of me must be ultimately just a patient waiting for You, a silent standing by until You, who are ever present in the inmost

center of my being, open the gate to me from within...I must stand ever ready and waiting, so that when You open the door to the decisive moment of my life...I shall not be so taken up with the affairs of this world that I miss the one great opportunity to enter into myself and into You.” (24) These few lines are a profound way of reflecting on today’s Gospel: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.”

Advent is a season to practice a prayerful disposition of waiting and watching.

During these next four weeks, let us not get caught up in the frustrations and complaints of our world. Instead, let us intensify our efforts in waiting, for as the prophet Isaiah said in our first reading, “no ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any god but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him.”