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## Homily 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent – Year C

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A few days ago, I saw a quote on social media, and it said this: *“Patience is not the ability to wait but the ability to keep a good attitude while waiting”*. I wonder what you are waiting for as we begin this season of Advent because Advent is described as a season of waiting, of anticipating, of looking forward, of hoping.

I suspect that we find it quite difficult to wait, or at least maybe this is autobiographical. And paradoxically, that is a lesson that we have to learn. It is the hard way that I have to learn. And maybe the Covid pandemic, if it had any benefits, did teach us something about slowing down and waiting. We live hectic lives and often think of waiting as something which is a problem, a frustration. Maybe we even think it is about doing nothing - wasting time. And yet, at the very heart of the season of Advent, we’re invited to wait.

In Luke’s Gospel, on this first Sunday of Advent, Jesus reminds us how easy it is for us to get lost in the busyness of life. In one translation, it’s quite stark, and he says: *“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy. Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy, and that day catch you out like a surprise.”* I suspect if we do not stop intentionally and learn how to wait - as Advent invites us to - it will easily seem that these weeks before Christmas just disappear, and Advent itself becomes a complete non-event in our lives. I suspect that for many of us, Lent is the event, and Advent is the non-event.

And yet the church invites us, at the beginning of this liturgical year, to take a step back and look at the bigger picture, take a breath and see things differently. In contrast to the busy world around us and the Christmas carols in malls weeks before Christmas, the Church, in this Season of Advent, invites us to intentionally learn how to wait, to train ourselves to wait patiently. Waiting not in frustration, or irritation, or anxiety or fear but in joyful anticipation and hope. You see, our waiting, our spiritual waiting, is not passive. It is not something that puts us into doing nothing, wasting time, but rather the kind of waiting we are talking about is active waiting because we are waiting on the Lord himself, who is always at work and always creating something new.

I want to suggest three things that we can do intentionally as we enter into this time of Advent, which could help us in our waiting. And the first is just simply to find in the next day or two a quiet time where you can become aware of what you are waiting for at this moment in your life. This could be anything: maybe on a surface level, you’re waiting for your 13th cheque, or you’re waiting for something you have been praying for. Perhaps you’re waiting to see someone at Christmas that you have not seen for a long time - a family member or a friend. Maybe you are waiting for the birth of a baby. Simply take some time quietly to become aware of what it is that you are longing for, what your heart is waiting for, at this moment.

I think the second invitation is that Advent invites us to look at our priorities. In the second reading in his letter to the Thessalonians, St Paul reminds us of what should be at the centre of our lives if we are going to be Christ-followers. He says: *“Brothers and sisters: May the Lord*

*help you to increase and abound in love for one another to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord with all his holy ones.”*

The priority of every Christ-follower should be to grow always in love and holiness. It might be good to sit down in these opening days of Advent and simply make a note of your priorities. This will give you insight into yourself and the trajectory that your life is on because our priorities speak about what is important to us. They speak about the things that we are most likely to do.

And the third thing I think we are invited to do - after naming what we are waiting for and simply listing our priorities - is to look at our lives through the lens of the Gospel. Jesus exhorts us to be alert, awake, and aware so that we can hear more clearly what God is saying.

And I want to suggest today that the opposite of being awake and alert is not being asleep. But rather, it is living “awake” in a false reality. You know, we spend time dreaming – dreaming about what we would do if we had more resources, or dreaming about a certain lifestyle. And it is, perhaps, while we spend time on these “if onlys” that the Lord passes us by and we miss opportunities to encounter God.

We might ask: do the longings of my heart, which I am waiting for, and the priorities that I have, open me up to notice how God is at work? But not just at work, but seeking to encounter me. You see, God desperately wants to encounter us in the reality of our lives: in the longings of our hearts, in the priorities that we hold dear. Does God really inhabit my longings and priorities or, are they all about me and what I want?

And so, how will you make this Advent different?

How will you make this Advent count? What are you really longing for?

What do your priorities say about the quality of your waiting for the day of the Lord?