

Advent II Year C

In the name of the one who was and is and is to come.

One of my fondest Advent memories was the first time I was old enough to go to my Grandmother's annual Christmas Eve party. I was two years old...I remember it like it was yesterday... It was a dressy early evening event at which there were adults and children. I remember anticipating getting to go every day for weeks ahead of time...a palpable expectant hope of this magical and sumptuous event...and the coup de grace was the appearance of Santa Claus himself...not a shopping mall Santa, mind you, but the real Santa, my brothers and I came to agree...this Santa was all in to guns because each year we would invariably receive cap guns and holsters...but that's another story. My grandmother would always call us fifteen minutes before the party to make sure we weren't late.

The butterflies in my stomach began to flutter Christmas Eve morning. We were to go at six o'clock. By the time I arrived I was a nervous wreck...My mother said I was a little high strung...everyone I knew was there in their coats and caps...Uncle Az...aunt Janet...my grandmother's neighbor friends...cousin Quin, his nose red with Christmas cheer...everyone dressed up in elegant expectation...eight millimeter movie cameras whirring and the giant antler-like lights attached to them...We had candy, cake and ice cream...and then the moment arrived...this long hoped for moment...word traveled through the house like electricity that Santa was about to arrive. I took one look at the fireplace and fled to the corner of the room unable to handle such coming reality.

I was eventually coaxed out...and as it turned out Santa came down the television antenna attached to the side of the house instead of down the chimney...and I remember being treated by him with extra care...and by morning he had come to our home as well and to all children's homes world-wide...this hope made flesh...this red-clad symbol of this coming thing for which our very souls ache.

It seems to me that this particular cultural liturgy in which all of us participate to some degree or another is a rich metaphor for teaching us to hope...a wonderful fable, as it were, that teaches us to live expectant lives...by the time, a few years later, I had learned the truth about Santa...it didn't matter so much...because I had learned the art of hope...the art of living expectantly for this coming reality...the metaphor took...and I'll never forget that night.

Jurgen Moltmann speaks of hope as an artifact from the future...an outward and visible sign...intuitive evidence of this coming thing...There would be no hope if it were not for the thing hoped for...And the writer of Luke tells us what this marvelous thing is...It is nothing short of a new order...a new world about which Mary the mother of Jesus sings...a world in which those made callous by greed are sent away...a world in which tyranny is subdued...a world in which the poor are sat down at a sumptuous banquet...a new, just world in which things are set right...a world in which mercy and compassion and care abound...a world of peace.

In our Gospel reading for today Luke has John the Baptizer quoting Isaiah, that it is the responsibility of the people of Israel to prepare for this way...Quoting Isaiah because this hope...this hope for this coming way...the way of our God...has forever been...the people of Israel forever hopeful, forever expectant...this reality of what truly is, the way the

world is rightly made, waiting to take root among us...coming as we speak...the news out among us like electricity...this coming thing, coming inevitably...In the beginning this hope was born....this hope for our world and our place in it set right...Throughout the Law and the Prophets...this hope witnessed to, kept alive, celebrated...And Luke tells us that this hope is for all flesh...all people...this hope of God's gracious commonweal in earth shared by all.

So the Baptizer tells us to get about making way for this new order...to prepare for it...to cast aside our dependence on anything that would cause us to lose hope, anything that would distract us from our work of preparation in these days of hope and expectation....that our very preparation engenders new hope, and invites this coming, ever so near. And the preparation...the preparation, in truth, in God's mystic manner of being, the preparation is the actual coming...the preparation is to live as God's faithful people...in love and charity with our neighbor....living lives of sacrifice for the good of the whole...And when loving neighbor is lived out, the way of God begins in truth, in the flesh.... the future coming at last, born from the beginning,...and word of it ramifies into the dark and lost corners of our world like a song... music from the stars...music of good news...the song of the world's salvation...the good and right order for all...

Prepare the way dear people of God...It is now for us, our responsibility, to prepare God's way...for time is short...and the world grows impatient...Prepare the way dear people of God...the hour of the banquet has arrived...and we must not be late.