

DECEMBER 3, 2017

First Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 IS 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7

You, LORD, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever.

Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?

Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you,
while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old.

No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him.

Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways!

Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful;

all of us have become like unclean people,

all our good deeds are like polluted rags;

we have all withered like leaves,

and our guilt carries us away like the wind.

There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you;

for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt.

Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.

Responsorial Psalm PS 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

R. (4) **Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.**

Reading 2 1 COR 1:3-9

Gospel MK 13:33-37

HOMILY

Most of my childhood, my mother worked at home, caring for my brother Bob, my sister Chris, and me, watching over us—Lord knows we needed it! When we were in junior high, Mom got a part time job during the day while we were at school, which worked out fine . . . unless there was the dreaded “day off of school.” One such day, mom went to work and left us a note: “Have some cereal for breakfast and do not mess up the kitchen!” (I wonder why she said this?) After getting up at the crack of noon, my brother and I decided it was time for a real breakfast! Eggs, bacon, pancakes, a delicious feast that left the kitchen, as my mother would tend to say, “like a tornado came through.” But we had time, so we cleaned it up—we thought very thoroughly—but this was teenage-boy thorough. Mom arrived home and we tried to act cool and innocent, like nothing had happened. Mom said, “what happened in this kitchen?” With feigned innocence, but also knowing better than directly lying, we said, “what do you mean, the kitchen looks fine! Mom replied, “Yes, it does, except why is there pancake batter on the ceiling?” *How did that get there—I still don’t know!* Yet, Bob and I had entered a pact of silence, so we tried this approach, “Well, we don’t know how that got there!” It seemed like we had stymied mom, until my mother the attorney called her first witness, a consistently reliable testifier, especially when we were on trial, my sister Chris. Chris gave expert testimony of eggs cracking, grease spattering, and batter flying, with such detail and consistency that, in the end, rendered our claims of innocence unsubstantiated and left us silenced. All we could do was throw ourselves on the mercy of the Court and receive her judgment. Fortunately, Judge Mom was as merciful and she was just!

This sad story of mischief, investigation of the crime, the calling of an all-too-expert witness, the silencing of the criminals before the facts, and the clemency of a most merciful judge might speak to us, I would suggest, of the beginning of our course of our Advent pilgrimage, our journey in our need to the Salvation of Bethlehem. This begins by attending to carefully chosen scriptural voices, who will guide us from our guilt to God's Christmas mercy, if we are willing. The beginning of our ability to receive my mother's mercy necessarily started with our being confronted with our tomfoolery and the evidence of our guilt; so too before our Lord's mercy. For, without an ability to face our guilt, to silence our defenses, and then receive the mercy held out to us in "God with Us," Christmas makes no sense.

This first leg in the Advent pilgrimage, this First Sunday of Advent, asks us to become more attentive to the merciful message of God who says: *you are in need of salvation*. And, using the privileged Biblical metaphor, we are confronted today by the voice of the prophet Isaiah, ever ancient and ever new, who will guide us these first three Sundays of Advent first of all this week into our stained, soiled state, SO THAT we might quietly attend to the truth of our need and then be attentive to the merciful voice of Jesus.

Today, this First Sunday of Advent, we are asked therefore to be attentive, to stop the commotion of our lives and in the truth of silence before God, be silenced by the overwhelming evidence of our guilt, the necessary first step to receiving the merciful salvation of Christmas, God-with-us. To help us do this, the voice of the prophet reminds us of the truth: we are stained and need to be reformed. Isaiah says to his people and speaks for all of us: "...we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind." He then continues by reminding us that, like mud in the hands of the Potter, we are clay that needs to be re-formed.

Can we be attentive to this voice of truth? For we have been petty, we have been irritable, we have been angry, we have been indifferent to the sufferings of others, we have been focused only on ourselves. We are in need of re-forming. Can we be attentive, that is, can we reach out with our hearts, to the voice of the prophet, accepting how we have failed, so that we might know and receive God's Christmas mercy? ***This attentiveness can only happen in silence.*** Otherwise, like those boys in the kitchen after the breakfast tornado, we'll keep pleading our case. May we have the grace to be silenced by the truth—that we are in need of re-formation by the hands of the divine Potter? Let's take a minute and ask in our hearts for the grace to be silenced before our pleas of defense and innocence and let us be attentive, that is, let us reach out, to our God in our need. [SILENCE]

Lord, you first formed us out of the clay of the earth into creations in Your image, but now we have become indeed a most de-formed clay. Now, in silence, we have been confronted with our failings and our need for your re-formation. Come, because we need you, to each of us, reach your merciful hands into the mire of our lives, and reform us. And, because you are mercy itself, into this mire is exactly where you want to meet us, heal us, save us and form us anew in your eternal attentiveness to us, by your Bethlehem-coming right into the very midst of human life. Bethlehem—the place where you came, has a name that means "House of Bread." Come again, on your Bethlehem way, to this House of Bread, this Eucharistic feast, and feed us in our need to be re-formed in your image in the power of the Sacred Bread that is your coming in mercy once again.