

I CAN'T WAIT!

That's a fairly common expression. We might use it when we're anticipating some long-awaited event – a once-in-a-lifetime trip to an exotic destination, a wedding day, or just the weekend after a long, grueling week at work. An expectant mother might think or voice those words in the eighth month and a child might be heard to exclaim "I can't wait" in these weeks before Christmas. But more and more, "I can't wait" seems to be the mantra of 21st century men and women, boys and girls, who have to have it all now.

Many years ago, I developed extreme sensitivity in my teeth, and my dentist recommended a toothpaste (name omitted lest I be charged with copyright infringement) that would relieve the sensitivity; he warned me, though, that it might take a few weeks for the effects to be noticeable. But yes, after a few weeks, the sensitivity to hot and cold was gone and I could eat and drink happily once more. Now, that same toothpaste brand has TV ads where the sensitivity sufferer complains that she might actually have to wait a week or more for her problem to be resolved – unless she uses this new toothpaste that works in **three days or less!** Now that's relief! The implication is that everything in life should happen on my terms, on my schedule, and according to my wants....I can't wait!

The Advent season we began last Sunday challenges us to put aside our impatience, our "need" to have it all now, our inability to wait for life to take its course. Advent invites us to renew our trust in our God who doesn't work according to our schedule but takes the long view, the view from eternity. Many decades ago, the former priest, Anthony Padovano, wrote a wonderful book called *Dawn Without Darkness*. I might have shared some of these quotes with you in a previous Advent, but they're worth considering again in this very impatient age in which we live. He wrote: "Nothing worthwhile in life is sudden. We wait for birth. We wait for love. We wait for life to reveal its meaning, year by year, experience by experience. Waiting is the law of life, the measure of love...Those who refuse to wait never become Christian...A Christian knows Jesus was awaited for a long time; the Christian is prepared to wait another long time for him."

Advent tells us that it's not only OK to wait – it's good, it's essential, it's what it means to be human. It's good to not have it all now if only because there can be so much joy in waiting. I love decorating for Christmas, but I do it gradually, and never before December 6th, St. Nicholas day. A few things come out each week, with the fresh cut evergreens brought in last. I have lights outside my home in Michigan, but they don't get turned on until a few days before Christmas. **Waiting** patiently for everything to take shape, seeing Christmas arrive bit by bit (along with the doors opening on my Advent calendars) is so much better than having it all NOW. And then for the two or three weeks after Christmas, until after the Baptism of the Lord in January, all those signs of Christmas remain – as they should – a reminder of how good it was to wait.

So, perhaps, if you're a certain age, think back to your childhood; I can. Remember a time when the Christmas window displays at Marshall Field's weren't revealed at Halloween, but on the Friday after Thanksgiving (still a bit too early, but better than today at Macy's). Recall how it felt to **wait** for the fresh (sometimes) Christmas tree to be purchased and perhaps stored in the garage until just a few days before Christmas, and then how exciting it was to bring it in the house and to help decorate it. Remember Christmas eve, maybe midnight Mass, then going to bed and **waiting** for Santa to arrive (we actually had a chimney for him), imagining that you heard his footsteps from your bedroom and having to **wait** until morning to see what he left for you. Then perhaps more **waiting** until everyone in the family had gathered before you could open your presents. But after the wrapping paper and ribbons had been gathered up and tossed out, it was all over! The **waiting** was so much more fun.

It's good to wait, to not have it all now, to let life unfold in God's good time because, as Padovano wrote, "Jesus comes only to hearts patient enough to wait for him." Can we do that? Come, Lord Jesus! We'll wait for you.

Fr. Bob