

First Sunday in Advent [b]

November 30, 2008

Readings

Isaiah 63:16b-17,19b; 64:2-7

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

Calendar

December 1: World AIDS Day

December 2: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

December 3: International Day for People with a Disability

Quotes

In order to overcome today's widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity.

~ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*

We wish to listen to one other: we believe that this itself is already a sign of peace. In listening to one another there is already a reply to the disturbing questions that worry us. This already serves to scatter the shadows of suspicion and misunderstanding. The shadows will not be dissipated with weapons; darkness is dispelled by sending out bright beams of light.

John Paul II, *Assisi, 24 January 2002*

Our nation has been blessed with great freedom, vibrant democratic traditions, unprecedented economic strengths, abundant natural resources, and a generous and religious people. Yet not all is right with our nation. Our prosperity does not reach far enough. Our culture does not lift us up; instead it may bring us down in moral terms. This new world we lead is still too dangerous, giving rise to ethnic cleansing and an inability to confront hunger and genocide. We are still falling short of the American pledge of "liberty and justice for all," our declaration to defend the inalienable rights of the person--"life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

--U.S. Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*

But it will be necessary above all to abandon a mentality in which the poor — as individuals and as peoples — are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced. The poor ask for the right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity for work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all. The advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral, cultural and even economic growth of all humanity.

~ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*

A person who is concerned solely or primarily with possessing and enjoying, who is no longer able to control his instincts and passions, or to subordinate them by obedience to the truth, cannot be free.

~ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*

Thoughts for your consideration

The advent message today is very simple. "Be watchful and alert."
God and the goodness of God are available.
All we have to do is be alert and watch and not miss it.

Unfortunately, sometimes our world is not watchful or alert and we miss God and the goodness of God. As individuals or as a society, we wander away from God and God's values. The question is: "why?"

Today might be a good time to reflect on those things in our society and culture that keep us from being alert and alive to God and God's values. There seem to be so many pressures and values which indoctrinate us and keep us from being what God wants us to be. So many ways of thinking and seeing are in tension with the values of Catholic Social Teaching. We need to be aware of them so that we can be truly free and alert.

As we look at our culture, we might want to reflect on

- The individualistic mentality that keeps us from solidarity and the common good
- The temptation to rely on power and even violence instead of love and active nonviolence
- The tendency to accumulate wealth instead of sharing material resources
- The practice of judging things from the limited view of our culture alone
- The lack of a seamless, all-inclusive respect for life
- The excessive power of the media which limits our vision
- The lack of direct contact with those who are in need or different than ourselves.

The list could go on and on. The challenge is to open our eyes and be alert and aware, so that we can know the biases of our culture, make this list concrete, and begin to see things from a bigger viewpoint.

In the face of all the challenges, we are invited to have hope. The second reading from the first letter to the Corinthians reminds us to rejoice in the spirit of Jesus who will help and set us free.

+++++

Those who want an end to the war in Iraq are hopeful that it will end with the new administration. Those who oppose the use of torture are hopeful that U.S. support for torture will end with the new administration. Those who want universal health care are hopeful that progress will be made with the new administration. Those who are worried about the poor in the midst of our economic recession are hoping for policies that help those who are most in need. People who are concerned with social change are placing a lot of their hope on the change of political leadership in our nation. As Christians we are always called to be people of hope. This is a good thing. However, as Christians we know that no political system or leadership will be perfect. We know that we always need as Jesus says today to be "watchful and alert."

Questions for Reflection in your Faith Sharing Group

What things in our culture keep you from being watchful or alert?
What are the things or values that keep you from the spirit of God?

+++++

Advent is a season of hope. What things give you hope? How is God's spirit offering to set us free? Do you have hope after the recent election or are you discouraged?

Actions - Links

World Aids Day is December 1.

Read What Does the Church Say About HIV/AIDS? by Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J at http://www.ncan.org/resources/church_say.cfm .

December 2 is the **International Day for the Abolition of Slavery**. The **Not For Sale Campaign** estimates that 27 million people in the world are enslaved in some way today. For more information go to: <http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/>

Not For Sale is a campaign of students, entrepreneurs, artists, people of faith, athletes, law enforcement officers, politicians, social workers, skilled professionals, and all justice seekers, united to fight the global slave trade.

Catholic Charities USA has summarized **poverty statistics** for each state in the USA at: <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1149>

37.3 million people live below the official federal poverty level, which was \$20,614 for a family of four in 2007. This number is up from 36.5 million in 2006. The number of people who are poor by the official government standards is more than to the combined populations of Iowa, Connecticut, Oklahoma, Oregon, Kentucky, Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, Colorado, New Hampshire and Idaho. Almost half of all Americans will have experienced poverty for a year or more at some point in their lives by the time they reach age 60.

“Crazy Facts”

AVERT, the international AIDS Charity, reports that “An estimated 22 million adults and children were living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa at the end of 2007. During that year, an estimated 1.5 million Africans died from AIDS. The epidemic has left behind some 11.6 million orphaned African children.”

Prayers of Intercession

Response: God, help us stay watchful and alert.

For those who have lost jobs or homes in the economic recession that is gripping our world, we pray....

For all those who are poor, especially the billions of people living on less than a dollar a day, we pray.....

For the rich and powerful, especially those who are addicted to their power and possessions, we pray.....

For all of our children, especially those who are growing up without access to a good education, we pray....

For all those with HIV/AIDS and their families, we pray....

For the media, especially the media controlled by those with power and money, we pray.....

For our churches everywhere, as they hope to become a welcoming, inclusive communities in the spirit of Jesus, we pray.....

Prayer – Meditation

World AIDS Day is December 1. Various prayers for those suffering from AIDS can be found at the site of Christian Aid at: <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/worship/church/chope/prayer1.htm>

Hear our prayer, O God of mercy and love,
for all who live with HIV or AIDS.
Grant them loving companions
who will support them in the midst of fear;
give them hope for each day to come,
that every day may be lived with courage and faith.
Bless them with an abundance of your love,
that they may live with concern for others.
Pour on them the peace and wholeness,
which you alone can give.
Through Jesus Christ, our Savior,
who came to give us abundant life.
Amen

*Vienna Cobb Anderson (shortened version) in *Prayers, Litanies and Liturgies*, Diocese of the Highveld, South Africa*

+++++

An Advent Prayer

God, Christmas is coming and I thought that I should send you a list of things that I want this year. I'm sending it early, so that you will have enough time to do the shopping. I know that I should not confuse you with Santa Claus; however, I think I might need some of the following:

1. A place to go to get away from all the ads.
2. A day of silence to just be with the mystery of incarnation.
3. A chance to be of service to the poor.
4. A little more time to be with my family and friends.
5. Some time to meditate on the fact that Jesus was born poor.
6. Time to be watchful and alert to the needs of those who are poor today.