

**December** 13th 2020

John 1:6-8, 19-28

What are you waiting for?

I mean it, what are you waiting for? It's all there already. The Christmas tree is up making it a Halloween Tree or an Advent tree, Christmas music has been playing since late October, the first three stollen have already been eaten.

My parents had to wait for all this until Christmas. That is why it is called Christmas tree, Christ-Stollen and Christmas carols. Advent, for them, was a time of happy anticipation and waiting for the nice and delicious things that were to come. I spent a lot of time in one family where every time *Silent Night* was played on the radio before the one Holy Night, which is Christmas Eve, someone had to get up and turn the radio off until the next song was up.

The famous German Lutheran pastor and 20<sup>th</sup> century martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the simple sentence, *To celebrate Advent means being able to wait.*

And we, what are we waiting for if everything is already there and done? By the time Christmas Day arrives, we are actually fed up with Christmas and on December 26 the decoration has to go.

John the Baptist did not have much sympathy for people who couldn't wait. When he was asked again and again, who are you? He did not answer. He did not say who he was, he would just say that he wasn't the one everyone was waiting for.

Are you Elijah, are you the prophet, are you the Messiah? No, that's not me, you'll have to wait.

What humility. There are all these people listening to him and following him and the elite from Jerusalem sends people to enquire about his identity and he doesn't seem to be tempted to pretend being someone he was not. He had the strength to point to someone who was more than he and to tell people they had to wait.

There is something in waiting, something healthy, something spiritual. Saint Benedict, one of the central figures of Western monasticism, wrote in his rule that every inquirer who would like to join the monastic community would have to keep knocking on the door of the monastery for days just to be rebuked every time. If the person would still return again and again, then they would let them in just to then have them wait some weeks in a guest room before someone would talk to them about their wish to join the community. From there it took months before something more formal would happen and years before someone would become a life-time member.

We have all been forced to wait a lot this year and we are still waiting for the end of this troubling time but that was no choice. There is something, I think, about a self-imposed waiting.

What are you waiting for? What do you want to wait for this year? What is worth waiting for?

And then there is this other simple question in our Gospel today. Who are you? Who are you? This is one of the questions like, How are you? that seem so simple but once you start thinking about them... There is the quick reply, My name is x and my position is yz. Is that who we are?

John the Baptist found that question so complex to answer that he only replied with negative statements who he was not.

Who are you? Do you have a real answer to that? I find it quite challenging, especially these days when I cannot really define myself as much by what I am doing as usual. I think of people who have lost their jobs during this Pandemic, people who lost their daily routines, programs, social contacts, traditions, religious rituals... All the things that help us to define who we are.

It is now, more than else, important to remember that no matter the circumstances, we are children of God who has called us into being and who has called us into an existence that does not depend on our jobs, positions, status, relations, programs but simply on being in this world as images of the creator.

We are children of God who, in Advent, are waiting for the coming of our God into this world knowing that God has long come into our world, our hearts and has never left our side. So with this paradox it might not be too big a thing to listen to Christmas carols before Christmas, after all. What we are waiting for as Christians, has long been given us and the ritual time of waiting during Advent is meant to help us remember that.

It is God's Yes over our lives and over us being as we are. Yet, while we are waiting anyway, let's use the time to share this Good News with the world.

What are you waiting for?