

+ J. M. J.

Earlier this week Fr. Mark sent a letter to each family explaining that during this new liturgical year we would begin a program of formation entitled *Gracious Living: A Response to God*. We respond to God because in our relationship with him as a people, a parish, or individual God always initiates that relationship by revealing himself and also revealing who we are. In love God then eagerly awaits our response. The first and most fitting initial response is to respond in prayer.

Honestly, prayer is not easy. This is one of the reasons the Father sent his Son into the world to teach us many things including how to pray. St. Augustine said there were three dimensions to Jesus' prayer. He prays for us because he is our priest. He prays in us because he is the Head of the Body of Christ. Finally we pray to him because he is our God.¹

We ask what is Jesus' prayer today. Jesus' prayer through the Church is one of vigilance and watchfulness. During Advent we the Church remember a people longing for their Savior. We enter into that mystery of Jesus' first coming into the world. We pray for that Christmas joy and gratitude, but we also await another coming, the second coming of Jesus Christ. We don't just await that coming we await it eagerly and with great expectation. That can be challenging.

The Lord's Prayer is especially apropos this Advent season. That prayer consists of seven petitions, the second of which is "thy kingdom come." Every time we pray the Our Father we are asking for God to bring about the perfection of love that is characteristic of the kingdom of God. We truly are asking for that kingdom to break in here on earth, but we are also begging, imploring for that fullness of the kingdom to arrive so that sin, death, and evil will be forever destroyed. We literally are asking for the end of time.

¹ CCC 2616

After the Lord's Prayer at Mass, the priest similarly prays on behalf of the whole Body "we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." That petition is something worthy of meditating on. When we pray those words are we eagerly awaiting Jesus' second coming? Are we eagerly awaiting our own death when we will see our Creator?

St. Cyprian who was not one for mincing words said in speaking of the second coming it is unreasonable to say "thy will be done" and not obey God's will. We're contradicting ourselves. He goes on "we struggle and resist like self-willed slaves and are brought into the Lord's presence with sorrow and lamentation, not freely consenting to our departure, but constrained by necessity. And yet we expect to be rewarded with heavenly honors by him to whom we come against our will! Why then do we pray for the kingdom of heaven to come if this earthly bondage pleases us?"

Those are stunning words. There are many things that we love about our earthly life and rightly so because they are gifts from God. We need to be grateful for them. Jesus, though, warns about a spiritual drunkenness. We can be so fixated and anxious about the things of this life such as cleaning and shopping that our vision of eternal life becomes blurred and our reason which was meant to ponder eternal things becomes impaired. We every once in a while need to think about death, our resurrection, and eternal life. How great will it be to be in the presence of God in three persons who knows me to my very depth in all my successes and failures and in all my joys and hurts, God who just wants to love me not for what I do but just for me? Then, how does eternity compare with or affect my plans for today? After we ponder these questions for a bit we beg that baby Jesus to come. He is the one who prays for us, who prays in us, and to whom we pray and he will

help shed some light on the awesomeness of eternal life. Meditating on eternal life and Jesus' second coming is what the season of Advent is about. Do I live my life awaiting eternal life?

In our opening prayer we asked God to **“increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his second coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven.”** As we pray the liturgy and enter into the season of advent let's beg Jesus to come and fill our hearts with that longing for heaven which is the first step toward living a life for eternity and living a life of gracious living.

May God bless you.