

# Along the track

## Learning by Waiting

Not long before Christmas last year I was in a waiting room where a mother of three children was paying the bill. The little ones were impatient and were running amuck. In frustration she said to them: “OK, there will be no advent calendar tonight!”. The response was immediate!

Many of the Advent calendars today seem to be about opening a window and taking out a treat. Sr Joan Chittister described one she had been gifted from Peru. It was a textile wall hanging, “a pastoral scene of palm trees and rural lean-tos hand-stitched by peasant women, quilt-style, across the top of a felt banner and under that were thirty small pockets, each of them filled with something we can’t see. Every day until Christmas, we are invited to find the part of the scene that has been pocketed for that day and attach it to the scene above, one piece of handwoven cloth adhering to the other as we go. Some of the pieces are of benign and beautiful things; some are not. There are bumble bees and angels, wild animals and dry straw, a branch-laden peasant man and a weary-looking woman. But there at the end of the days, as common as all the rest of the items in the scene, is the manger; the sign of the One who knows what life is like for us, who has mixed His own with ours.”

Advent has a number of messages. It is about waiting, not something that comes naturally these days in our impatient world. We are used to the instant, the rapid response, the fast internet etc. Advent is about slowing down, staying in the present, rejoicing and giving thanks for today. It makes us think. In Chittister’s wall hanging, ‘some pieces are benign, some beautiful and some are not.’ In other words, some days are diamonds, some days are stone but they all have a message, they are all part of life, all part of our journey to God. Advent can help us look for God in all those places we have overlooked – in the ordinary events of the day, in the times we stumble and in the times we succeed, when we suffer or wonder, when we feel let down and when we feel supported, when we believe and when we doubt. We are becoming as we go.

Advent is to remind us what we’re waiting for as we go through life. The calendar builds up the scene as we go along. At the end of the days is the manger, the reminder that Jesus became one of us, the image of the One who knows what life is like for us, the one who has been there before us, the one who, in the words of St Paul, is like us in all things (4,15). It is a reminder that Jesus understands, he knows what it is to be human, he knows the ups and downs of life, the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of life.

St Paul wrote that Jesus is like us in all things but sin. Advent helps us to understand that we are not perfect, we make mistakes, take wrong choices, we follow where we should not, we miss the mark, that even the best of us suffer from anger, the desire for revenge or holding grudges. Even the best-intentioned people do harm — we all have our blind spots, our unexamined beliefs, our own tender places. Advent can also help us understand that sin is harmful, destructive, hurtful, that it can destroy and damage. But Advent also reminds us that we can do something about that, that we can work to repair where we have caused hurt, we can forgive without expecting that to be earned, that the path of repentance is one that can help us not only to repair what we have broken as far as we can but we also grow in the process of doing so.

Advent reminds us that life is more than just this life. We journey through Advent waiting for the Coming of Jesus who is coming so that we may have life to the full. We are waiting on the one who will show us The Way to the Father, the one who will answer the question Jesus asked, what are you looking for? Advent is about hope. Hope is not something that helps us cope in the down times, it is not some unrealistic dream. Hope transforms the ordinary events and dreams and events of daily life. Hope is believing beyond to-day and knowing that my life can make a difference.

Regards  
Jim Quillinan

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)