Second Sunday of Advent: Thy Kingdom Come!

Let me tell you about Fr Pascucci's dog. Fr Pascucci is a good dog owner. He makes sure his dog is groomed and gets his exercise. He is particularly careful that his dog gets food that is the best for him. He doesn't give him spaghetti, or even one of the meatballs. Yet every time Fr Pascucci sits down to eat, his dog is there looking up at him with puppy dog eyes waiting to see if anything falls to the ground, or better yet, if Fr. Pascucci throws him something. Fr Pascucci calls his dog, Advent, because to the dog there is always hope.

Advent us the season of hope, profound hope. Hope not in the things of the world, like a fallen meatball, but hope in the presence of the Lord, coming to feed us with the best of food, His very presence defeating sin, righting the wrongs of the world, imparting universal love.

Under the banner of hope, there is a word or phrase that each of the four Sundays revolves around. Last Sunday that was Stay Awake. Next Sunday it's rejoice. The fourth Sunday it's behold. This Sunday the word is Prepare.

So we are introduced to John the Baptist preaching a baptism of repentance at the Jordan River and telling the people why they needed to repent. They need to repent because the Kingdom of God was near. They needed to prepare for the Lord. They need to prepare themselves for the Lord. "He is coming," John the Baptist says. People flocked to hear John the Baptist, but the One who is coming is infinitely greater than John. "You think, I'm something," John says to those people from Jerusalem and all of Judea. "I am not fit to loosen the straps of his sandals, let alone wash his feet. So prepare," John says, "the Kingdom of God is near."

The Kingdom of God is near. That was the main message of John. It was also the basic message of Jesus and of the disciples. The kingdom of God. We pray for this Kingdom to come every time we say the Our Father, thy Kingdom come.

What do we mean by this? Is it just a phrase we say without considering its implications? If the Kingdom of God comes, what would change in the world, in our lives? The first reading from Isaiah says that the One to Come would not judge by appearance nor by hearsay. The rich would not have an advantage over the poor should they go to court. Right now, poor people often receive far greater sentences than the rich who can afford a good lawyer. Instead he will judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Those people who are bullies in the way they treat others, those people who care only about themselves, will have to answer to the One Who Is to Come.

In a poetic way, Isaiah prophesies a time when there is no more killing, when even the animals no longer feed on each other, a time when little children no longer

die. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.

If this were the Kingdom of God, then accumulation of possessions would no longer be the goal of people's lives. They would work hard for love, not for stuff. People would be satisfied with what they need, and not be concerned with what they want.

Thy Kingdom Come. But do we really want this? Would we be satisfied with what we need, not want? Would we be destroyed if our fondest possessions were gone so that others could have what they need? When we pray, Thy Kingdom Come, we are praying for a radical change not just to the world, but to our own lives. Do we really want this? That's a serious question that I need to ask myself and you ask yourselves. Would we be happy to have less and love more? That is what we are praying for when we say the Our Father.

If the coming of the Kingdom of God is going to make radical changes to the world, and if we really want this, then the question that naturally follows is: what am I doing about it? What am I, what are you doing to bring about the change that results from the coming of the Kingdom? We, you are doing a great deal already. First, we are here, aren't we? We are here to grow in our faith. We are here to ask the Lord to help us withstand the temptations of the world. Second, parents first but all of us are engaged in raising children for God. Whether it's teaching your 9 year old to be truthful, making your home a holy place, a little church, or helping with religious education or some form of youth ministry, be it in the Church or on the sports field or in the arts, you, we, are raising children for God. We spend a great deal of time and energy on our children, and it is all worth it if it helps them become that unique reflection of God they were created to bring to the world.

We are doing a great deal to make the Kingdom a reality, but we have so much more we can do and need to do. What can we do about the people who are homeless and who due to psychological issues cannot hold a job? What can we do for families that have a chronically ill child or a child with mental or emotional needs? What can we do to further mutual understanding and respect in a society that has granted a degree of credence to its radical elements? There is much we have to do. Working for justice is the work of the Kingdom. It is first on Isaiah's list of the work of the One Who Is to Come.

There shall be no harm or ruin on my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD.

Advent hope is not a fantasy about some new world. It is a declaration of our belief that God will come and set the world straight. And He will come.

But first, we have to do our part.