

1st Sunday of Advent 2010

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Three simple questions to begin: The first: Where are you coming from today? From the north, the south, the east, the west? From Chestnut Hill, Brighton, Brookline, Belmont? Newton, West, Center, Corner, Highlands, Upper/Lower Falls? JP, Milton? Are you coming from much further away, visiting family for Thanksgiving? From what point did your procession to this Church begin this morning? What direction did you take? Like the image of the people of God from all nations in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, streaming from all directions to gather as one, we too have come from all different directions to this One holy place to begin another liturgical year together. In this season of the year when we find ourselves going in all different directions to “get things done”, we come from different directions to this Holy place not to “get something done” but to take our place around God’s table where we are fed with God’s Word and Sacrament.

Where are you coming from today? How are you feeling? Are you filled with gratitude for family and friends with whom you gathered for Thanksgiving? Are you stuffed with all the good stuff that comes from the day of Thanks? Or are you weighed down by worries, anxious about health or wealth? Are you filled with joy, anticipation, excitement? Were you looking forward to being here? Can you claim for yourself the joy of the responsorial psalm “I rejoiced when I heard them say, let us go to the

House of the Lord!”? Are you rejoicing to be here this morning, making your way in procession, on foot or on the T, in caravan (i.e, car or van) to this Holy place?

Second Question: What are we doing here? On the surface we are doing what we do every Sunday, singing, praying, listening to the word of God, offering gifts of bread and wine, in communion receiving back more than we can possibly imagine in the body and blood of Christ. We are doing the rite thing! That is RITE! Yes, it’s the r-l-g-h-t thing to do but it’s the R-I-T-E thing. The ritual of the advent season will sound and look a little different but the basic structure of our worship together is always the same. We gather, we listen, We give thanks and praise and we receive more than we can possibly imagine in the body and blood of Christ. So much so that we become the Body of Christ for the world.

But the **Rite** thing is not **right** enough unless the Spirit **writes** it in our hearts. (Ah the beauty and complexity of language!) In a presentation that she gave last summer at the National Pastoral Musicians Convention, Kathleen Hughes uses a framework of understanding what we are doing here at Mass that comes from a book by Mark Searle: Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual and Social Perspectives. In it he speaks of the first level of our participation in the rite as what I referred to as the “rite-thing”, the sitting standing, kneeling, praying, singing stuff. The second level of active participation is involvement in the liturgy as the Work of Christ. In Eucharist we enter into Christ’s liturgy, the endless self-giving of Christ into the hands

of the One he calls Abba, from who he receive back his life. Our worship is an offering of our whole selves with and in Christ to God.

The third form of active participation is in the Trinitarian Life of God. In this Eucharist we are invited into the very life of God, we are drawn into God's very life. What could be more awesome than that? Through the action of God's Holy Spirit, God's life is poured into our hearts, flooding their depths, to draw us into the depths of God!

If you are thinking to yourselves, that sounds good but it's not what I experience, you are not alone. It's easier to just "go through the motions", do the rite thing, but the right thing is to go deeper into the mystery of what we are doing here, week after week. What needs to be written in our hearts is the great prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving, the Eucharistic Prayer, that I am told most of us tune out. "Too many words that the priest is saying. It doesn't hold my attention" This prayer which is Christ's prayer, voiced by the priest in dialogue with all of you is breathtakingly beautiful in its narration of God's abundant love for us in Christ Jesus. That is why we have decided to focus on this prayer throughout the advent season. Each week there are Prayer Cards for you to take home and pray with. They contain the text of the first part of the Prayer with questions for reflection so that you may enter into the prayer more deeply.

Third Question: Where are We Going to? Each of us came here today as individuals with each one's personal hopes, dreams, anxieties, joys and

sorrows. That I, however, is meant to become We. As we will hear in the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer:

Through the gospel proclaimed by your Son you have brought together in a single Church people of every nation, culture, and tongue. Into it you breathe the power of your Spirit, that in every age your children may be gathered as one.

Each of YOU is called to become ONE in Christ. More than neighbors, more than friends, more even than brothers and sisters, We become One in Christ and as Christ was for others, so are we. We are sent from this Holy place returning in the direction from which we came but hopefully transformed. Hopefully ready to live and love our world with God's passion.

Where are you coming from? Where are We Going? Just wait and see.