

Second Sunday of Advent – Year B – December 7, 2011 - Homily
Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15; Mark 1:1-8
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Time has always fascinated me. Most of you know how much I enjoy science fiction, including concepts like H.G. Wells' time machine, as well as *Star Trek*. According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, some of the oldest civilizations began to develop clocks five to six thousand years ago. The world has moved on from water clocks and sundials to mechanical, quartz and atomic clocks. Now we even have different time zones relative to Greenwich Mean Time. Yet when it comes to Christ's coming again in glory, none of us can answer the question, what time is it?

The Petrine community of faith was trying to deal with scoffers who claimed that God evidently has no part in the life of the world. Peter has three responses, which are encouraging, and affirm the basic truth that *God has all the time in the world!* The first argument is the power of God's word to create and to destroy found in the verses just before tonight's passage. The second is the difference in understanding between God's time, which we call *kairos*, and *chronos* or chronological time, in which we live and move and have our being. Peter uses Psalm 90 to explain that God's timing is not our timing. In fact, God is not tardy or slow in acting, but merciful and patient, for the sake of reconciling the whole world to Himself in Christ Jesus. Thirdly, Peter points to the gracious character of God. God has promised and God is faithful. Yet, God is also sovereign. As we say in the Lord's Prayer, "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory". We are members of God's kingdom, but the power and the glory are all His.

The real question is how will we wait? What will our lives look like in these in-between times? Peter speaks of holiness and godliness, and of peace. For many of us, these words seem to be reserved for special occasions like coming to church, or participating in Bible study. They've lost their transformative power for daily living by being bottled up and stored in a cellar like a bottle of wine. These are God's creative words of restoration, healing and wholeness. They're expressions of a way of life, without boundaries or restrictions in the power of the Holy Spirit. Living in holiness, godliness and peace is the way that we, as the Body of Christ, witness to God's presence, faithfulness, and hope to the world.

Holiness isn't taking on a self-righteous holier-than-thou kind of attitude that immediately comes across as judgmental. The word 'holy' simply means to be set apart by God for God's purpose. By God's grace, our faith puts our feet firmly on a path that sets us apart from the rest of the world. God blesses us with the gift of the Holy Spirit as provision for the journey, and the means to live holy lives. That is to serve God and our neighbors. Our ongoing transformation in the lessons of holy living requires us to maintain a close relationship with God in Christ Jesus through prayer and worship. We must do our part to increase our knowledge of God, through Bible study. We're constantly called to discern God's will, by listening attentively, and staying awake in Christ. We also share the Good News of Jesus as His witnesses in and through the things we say and do.

Godliness seems like a tall order doesn't it. In all humility, we're not God. However, in our service to God and our neighbors we can be mirrors of the nature and character of our Master. After all, we're created in God's image. However, we must remember that God is not a doormat to be walked all over, nor is He a vending machine freely dispensing everything we ask for or demand. God provides us with what we need, and gives us frequent opportunities to reflect the justice and

equality that walks hand in hand with kingdom living. In order to reflect godliness we cannot be doormats or vending machines either. There will always be people who abuse God's love, mercy and compassion. It doesn't stop God from loving them, or providing for their needs, but wherever possible we must help people to provide for themselves. It's like the old proverb, "if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him how to fish, you feed him for life." Our baptismal covenant calls us to work for justice and peace, and to respect the dignity of every human being. There's no dignity in teaching people to be dependent on handouts. Sharing God's love by extending a hand up, reveals the love of Christ, and helps others to put their faith and trust in Him.

The scriptures speak of God's peace or *shalom*, as the peace that passes all understanding, and as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Peace is not just the absence of conflict. It's a heartfelt desire for God's best for all, and the daily actions that move us in that direction. As a fruit of the Holy Spirit, peace is a gift from God that allows us to remain calm and joyful, whatever the world throws at us. Advent is a good time to practice God's peace. Culture is doing its best to dictate what we should be doing and how we should be feeling. With only eighteen shopping days to Christmas, we're supposed to be feeling all warm and fuzzy, and sentimental so that we recklessly spend significant amounts of money on Christmas presents and all kinds of other seasonal silliness. No marketing firm or store wants us to stop and think about where true peace and joy are found, because loving God in Christ Jesus doesn't cost anything. Moreover, we are a lot less likely to buy meaningless stuff if we focus on celebrating the birth of Christ in our hearts and lives.

This time is God's time. We might think of it as the meantime, but it's got nothing to do with Greenwich! Godly meantime is not a time for despair, but a time of patient anticipation. This meantime is not a time for frustration, but one of holy transformation, and godly living. Meantime is the time of our salvation. It is a divine gift whereby we have the opportunity to show the world what a joy it is to live in faith, hope and trust, knowing that God's timing is always perfect.

Amen.