

I was reading the newspaper Saturday afternoon and came across a comic strip that I thought was interesting and maybe ties into the advent theme.

The comic strip is called For Better Or Worse.



Hopefully I can do a little advertising for God during my homily today

Comfort, hope, kindness, patience, and preparation, these are the things to think about this 2nd week of Advent.

In the first reading Isaiah is called upon by God to console his people who are coming out of exile. He is told to “give comfort to my people, speak tenderly, and prepare the way of the LORD!”

Most Americans know that somehow the Christmas figure Santa Claus is based on "Good St. Nick." In the early fourth century, St. Nicholas was the bishop of Myra. He began his life and time as bishop under the persecution of Roman emperors. Many legends grew up around him, all based on his practice of charity and kindness to the poor.

One legend is of a poor man with three daughters who could not marry because he was too poor to provide a dowry for them. In secret St. Nicholas saw that the father received three bags of gold so that he could provide a gift for each of his daughters.

Nicholas became a saint in an unusual fashion. Until Nicholas, virtually all declared saints had been martyrs. Not so with Nicholas. He lived the example of Christ in his life. Nicholas was not canonized in the typical way. He became a saint through popular acclaim. That someone could become a saint merely by the way that person lived was practically a new concept, one that gave hope to thousands that they too could become a saint.

Yesterday was the feast of St. Nicholas, a day on which gifts were given to many children around the world. Today, in the United States, we remember Pearl Harbor, a

moment fading from our collective memory, but a moment that is remembered as a turning point in U.S. and world history. It may have been a tragic day in our history but it was a day of hope for many in Europe and other parts of the world for it signaled that help was coming to end the oppression that many were suffering.

Nicholas began his life during the time of persecution of Christians and World War II began with the tyranny of rulers in Germany and Japan. John the Baptist preached in a world equally disturbed with political and religious upheaval. Judea was an occupied land and the Romans were ruthless rulers. Many of the Jews that had come to power were seen as collaborators with Rome, sinful and corrupt. Into this environment John brought a word of hope. He announced that God was coming.

The psalm between the readings speaks of kindness, we ask God to show us a time where “Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven” We still ask for these today.

The second reading tells us of patience, that things happen in God’s time not ours. That God’s promises will not be delayed.

One of my favorite verses in the bible comes from the Book of Habakkuk where it is written “I will stand at my guard post, and station myself upon the rampart, And keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what answer he will give to my complaint.

Then the LORD answered me and said: Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily.

For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.”

Bottom line: We need to learn God's time - to avoid those sins of impatience that cause so much harm. If we wait patiently, he will give us every good thing.

Patience is such an important virtue. It means waiting, sacrificing some immediate satisfaction for the sake of a greater good. Impatience, on the other hand, is the unwillingness to wait, wanting it all right now.

Today so many of our problems come from being impatient. Consider our current financial meltdown. Bankers, eager to make a quick profit, told young people that they could have it all, and have it now: a new house, a new car, everything. No need to wait. Well, our impatience to have it all has sadly caught up with us.

Advent is a time to learn patience. It is a season of "waiting in joyful hope." Today we lit the second candle of the Advent Wreath. The Advent Wreath (in its modern form) was invented to teach patience. A man named Johann Hinrich Wichern had founded a home for poor children in Hamburg. The children kept asking him how many days were left until Christmas. As a response, he developed the Advent Wreath with its candles to give the children some idea.

We use the Advent Wreath for a similar purpose - to learn patience: To wait, not nervously, but patiently. Things sometimes seem dark, but the Advent Wreath says that the light of Christ has come - and that it will grow.

Finally the gospel tells us to get prepared and gives us hope of better things to come. There are many voices crying out these days, including those that warn of impending terror. Just this week, the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism released its report. The report, titled "World at Risk," points to biological and nuclear risks and highlights the need for preparedness

While such preparation needs to be taken seriously on the part of governments entrusted with protecting their citizens, it is not the kind of preparation we Christians engage in during this Advent season. While the apocalyptic vision alluded to in the reading from 2nd Peter this Sunday, might suggest a nuclear holocaust ("the heavens will be dissolved in flames and the elements melted by fire"), this is not what we look for.

"We await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells". Shoppers prepare for the holidays by buying what they can, sometimes even purchasing things they don't really need just because they're on sale. Governments prepare for terror and war because they fear what may happen if they are not ready. The faithful Christian prepares for the Lord's coming by acting in righteousness toward God and toward one's fellow human beings. We prepare in this season by seeking justice, and peace, and kindness, and truth as Psalm 85, promises.

The words of the carol cry out: Come, all ye faithful. But come now not to Bethlehem, but to every place, every heart, that is in need of God's justice and love.

And so today I say to you, Come; let us do a little advertising and in joyful hope, prepare the way of the Lord.