

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 3, 2017

As we gather today we enter a season of desire, and of longing, a season of wonder, of hope, and perhaps even restless fear. And the question or questions in our hearts may be for what are we desiring, what is it that we long for, what impels us to wonder, what are our hopes and what causes restless fear?

Desire seems to challenge us to receive something elusive that we want but do not have. Longing may imply a yearning, a wistful wish. Wonder is like the eyes of a child when the lights on the Christmas tree are turned on for the first time. Hope means that something may be coming but is not yet here.

All of the above would suggest that something is missing, absent, gone, wished for...

Our hearts are restless.

In the book, Goodness and Light, Readings for Advent and Christmas, Robert Barron writes, "In a wonderful avant-garde German movie *Run Lola Run* a young woman finds herself in a terrible bind: She needs to gather an enormous amount of money in a ridiculously short period of time. Throughout the movie she

runs and runs, desperately trying through her own frantic efforts to make things right, but nothing works. Finally, at the moment when she finds herself at the absolute limit of her powers, she slows to a trot, looks up to heaven and says, "*Ich warte, ich warte,*" (I'm waiting, I'm waiting.) Though she does not explicitly address God and though there has been no hint throughout the movie that Lola is the least bit religious this is undoubtedly a prayer. And in the immediate wake of her edgy request a rather improbable solution to her problem presents itself.

Barron continues, "Lola's prayer has always reminded me of Simone Weil, that wonderful and mysterious 20th century French mystic whose entire spirituality is predicated on the power of waiting, or—in her language—of expectation. In prayer, Weil taught, we open our souls, expecting God to act even when the content of that expectation remains unclear. In their curious vigilance and hoping against hope, both Lola and Simone are beautiful Advent figures."

And what about us? The work of Advent is not easily accomplished...in fact, in the first reading Isaiah the prophet seems

to be reminding God of the waiting ... Isaiah questions divinity..."Why do you let us wander from your ways?" And he goes on to suggest that God should make a move when he says, "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down..."

Isn't that something like us? Don't we sometimes question God or remind God of specific answers to our waiting prayer?

It occurred to me very recently that Benedictines, by virtue of a reminder in the Rule of Benedict, are indeed Advent people. Formation personnel are challenged to be certain that "the novice truly seeks God." Isn't this Advent? Doesn't Advent longing, desiring, and waiting motivate us to truly seek God?

"God is faithful," St. Paul reminds us in a letter to the Corinthians. And this faithful God is with us in our desiring, our yearning, our longing, our wandering.

Our Advent is not like the waiting and the yearning that our Israelite ancestors experienced. Century after century they waited, they looked, they watched, they yearned and to their surprise God

came to them in a quite unexpected way, as a tiny infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger in Bethlehem, with his parents and a group of most unlikely visitors including shepherds, angels and farm animals, who, more than likely did not even recognize the divinity right in front of them.

Aren't we sometimes like that when we seek God, kind of being rather sure of where we should look...and overlooking the divinity right in front of us.

My hope and prayer for Advent is that we continue to seek God, and that our yearning, watching and waiting be replete with the surprises that only God can give...the true gifts at Christmas.

Maranatha...Come Lord Jesus!

-Sister Karen Brink, OSB