

First Sunday of Advent, December 3, 2017

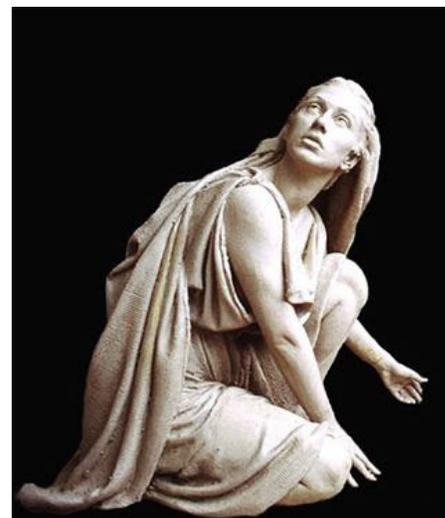


by *Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy*

Waiting is contrary to human nature. The idea of being idle goes against the grain for easily distracted people of modern times. Our highly technical, secular and individualized culture says there are simply too many things to get done, accomplish and achieve. The motion of busyness can be more of a comfort than the dullness of waiting.

Yet here we find ourselves in Advent, the liturgical season of “waiting.” What special gift is God offering us from this exercise of waiting?

Advent is a time to look back and remember that Christ became incarnate in the world through Mary giving birth to Jesus and laying him in a humble manger. Advent is also a time to look ahead and anticipate what scripture says...that Christ will come again, at some unspecified time of judgment. Advent reaffirms that Jesus Christ has come and will indeed return.



Simply put, we live in a reality of “already and not yet.” In between this remembering and anticipating, the season of Advent calls us to “Be watchful...Be alert” (MK 13:33) in our waiting.

So what is the gift? During Advent, we begin to learn that waiting is anything but dull or boring. It allows us to pay attention to a different perspective; that which is unseen, beyond our control, out of sight and without physical evidence. Watchful and alert waiting is countercultural for most, likely counterintuitive for many and most certainly not easy. But the gift of this kind of vigilance is that it holds the power to cultivate in us a deeper recognition of God’s plan. The prophet Isaiah likened this to the process of molding pottery, “we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.” (Is 64: 2-7)

Watchful and alert waiting can reveal to us God’s intention to bring about love, justice, and mercy in our world. As we deepen our recognition that Christ came to us in humility--not might--to become light for the world, God’s love, justice, and mercy becomes ever bright. In the light of this physically darker season, we might better perceive the violations and harms happening in our world as contrary to God’s vision.

I invite you to ponder one such violation this Advent. In our watchful and alert waiting, the still too common practice of death penalty persists as one of the gravest killing systems of our time. Pope Francis recently called the death penalty “contrary to the Gospel” and “inadmissible because it attacks the inviolability and the dignity of the person.” Currently, 31 states still have the death penalty. Ten states are extremely active in death sentencing--Texas, Florida, and Nevada. Nearly 3000 people today sit on death row. Disadvantaged poor people and people of color are disproportionately represented on death row. The recent statement by our Holy Father draws renewed attention to this violation of God’s plan for a kind of justice that allows rehabilitation and restoration. The practice of execution is a turn away from God’s mercy and a rejection of God’s love.

Perhaps this season of waiting will instill in us a renewed sense of God’s immense love for us in sending God’s only Son, Jesus, to become incarnate in our world. Over the next four weeks, may our discipline of watchful and alert vigilance be a time to understand more fully God’s plan for love, justice, and mercy. May the Advent liturgical movement within our hearts allow us to advocate for an end to capital punishment in our country.

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy is Managing Director of Catholic Mobilizing Network. She is co-author of Advocating for Justice: An Evangelical Vision for Transforming Systems and Structures.

