

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**In reflecting on the Scriptures, there is great value in being mindful of the historical context in which it was written and some sense of the intent of its author. Most of this new liturgical year that begins on this First Sunday of Advent, we will be reading from the Gospel according to St. Mark. Mark's narrative is packed with action, as compared to Matthew's which seeks to convey more of the meaning of the Gospel events, or John's which serves to show the transcendent glory of Christ; or Luke's which is dominated by a historical perspective.**

**Mark focuses on the saving work of Jesus. Blind beggars, sick children, grieving parents, and demonic madmen take center stage. As Jesus delivers each one, he progressively revealed himself to be the savior of all who believe in him. That is Mark's intent to show Jesus on a rescue mission.**

**This message was desperately needed by the small Christian community of Mark's time. He wrote around the year 70 A.D., a period of chaos in the Roman empire. Assassins had killed the emperor Nero, three totally inept emperors followed in quick succession, and revolutions against Roman occupation were exploding throughout the Empire. These insurrections were put down viciously by the Roman armies. In Judea, the Roman general Vespasian fought the Jews ferociously before hurrying back to Rome to be acclaimed the new Emperor. He left his son, Titus, to clean up the last of the resistance and in August, 70 A.D. he broke through the walls of Jerusalem, sacked the city, and destroyed the Temple, which to this day has never been rebuilt.**

**It was in this context, as the small Christian communities were overwhelmed with fear and anxiety and crying out for Christ to come back to save them, to rescue them from the mayhem all around them, that Mark has Jesus speak to his disciples these words, "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come...Watch therefore...May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"**

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**This time in which we live, we find that our world is as perilous as it was in the first century. Wars and insurrections are taking place throughout the world. What seemed absurd to even talk about less than ten years ago, the possibility of nuclear war is being contemplated. Climate change is wreaking havoc, with natural disasters multiplying across the globe. Even in our own nation we are as divided as we've ever been, politically, socially, and materially, except perhaps during the period of the Civil War. Like those early Christians, many of us find ourselves calling out to our God to save us in a world seemingly gone mad.**

**But we are a culture that doesn't want to hear, "Watch and wait". We are a microwave, ATM, movies-on-demand kind of society. We are a text-happy, push notification people with express check-out and overnight delivery. We are a fast-food culture, but we sometimes forget that this God we love and serve most often moves at a crock-pot pace. This is painful for us, His impatient children. God doesn't seem to mind keeping us waiting.**

**With Christmas fast approaching, it gets more and more difficult to "wait" on the coming of the Lord. We want the Christmas decorations up before we even had a chance to put the Halloween décor away. St. Paul recognized our impatient, human longing. It's why he had to remind and encourage the Christians in Corinth to be patient. We hear him in our Second Reading implore them, and us, "as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ...keep firm to the end...because God is faithful."**

**Likewise, the Prophet Isaiah reminds us that the Lord will come in glory "for the sake of his servants." God will send us a redeemer precisely because He loves us! While we wait, we need to be patient, watchful, living our lives in such a way that we are ready for His return. Considering these Scriptures, it seems to me that it is fair to ask, "What is God waiting for? Why doesn't he come save us now?"**

**I believe there is a hint of an answer to these questions in the last verse of Isaiah's prophecy that we read today, "Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter; we are all the work of your hands."**

**Reflecting on this, my favorite image of my relationship with God, I imagine God as a potter sitting at his wheel, and spinning it, and ever so slowly, so very carefully taking the clay of our lives and gently molding us into that perfect image of himself who is Christ. At times the clay of our lives becomes too moist with the many sinful distractions that cause our lives to fall apart and He has to add a little bit more clay to begin his work all over again. At other times the clay of our lives becomes so dry with anxieties and cares that He has to moisten it with a little bit more of His love. But always, inexorably, he spins and he spins until the clay of our lives take on more and more that perfect image of Himself who is Christ.**

**If that is the case, it would seem that the Lord is the one who is really waiting on us to surrender the clay of our lives so that he can finish the work that He has begun in us—who wait on Him.**

**During this first week of Advent, in preparation of celebrating the birth of Our Savior, may I challenge you to try to think of yourselves as clay in the hands of the Potter. Can you offer him a little bit more of yourself, pulling away from the sinful distractions that are weakening you, so that He may continue his work of forming you into the perfect image of Himself who is Christ? Or might you let go a little bit of the cares and anxieties that are weighing you down and tearing you apart, that he might moisten the clay of your lives with His love?**

**While we wait on the Lord to do His work in us, may we carry these words of the Prophet forth today, “No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait on him. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in all our ways!...Yes, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter; we are all the work of your hands.**