

First Sunday of Advent – Cycle B (November 27, 2011)

Advent asks us, "What happens when worlds collide?" We live in our ordinary world of work, daily routines, family life, outside commitments and just plain life. In this world, we can be lulled in the constant flow of activities and obligations that seem to dominate our lives....our worlds become all that there is. The truth is that underneath this world of ours is another world, which Jesus called His Kingdom, a world in which He gently calls us to embrace and live. Advent reminds us to Wake Up and encounter the Presence of Jesus and His coming into our worlds. The world of the Kingdom does not so much collide with ours, although that is what it feels like at times, but overshadows and transforms everyday life.

Jesus came into our lives and all of human history some 2,000 years ago and the magnificence of that first coming was quiet, gentle and poor. Two worlds collided in a quiet explosion of Love, first revealed to a poor couple trying to find a place to allow this explosion to take place, in a cave with animals with shepherds as witnesses.

And he continues to come each and every moment of our lives. But it is up to us to awaken to this coming. He came to 1037 W. Armitage last week, before thanksgiving, in the person of a homeless man. When I let him in, I let in Christ, of whose presence I was totally unaware. I expected the usual, "Can I have some money?" or "Can I have some food?" but got instead, "Can I have some underwear?" After the request, I sort of hoped he would have asked for the money. But he clarified his request. He made it clear that he did not want clean, but used, underwear, but new underwear and undershirts. He said, "I just want my own new underwear. Everything can be used...but not the underwear." There's old cliché says that "beggars can't be choosers," but sometimes they indeed should be "choosers" when it involves their own dignity. My world was invaded.

Christ came when I opened that front door and he comes to your own door; he comes when you answer the phone, even a pesky wrong number or the dreaded solicitor; he comes in the people with whom you live and work; he comes as you are walking down the street or driving in a car; he comes through a billboard or church sign like: "Saints have a past, but sinners have a future." (I read this sign on North Avenue and Elmhurst Roads). Yes, Christ came by uniting His divinity in the humanity of Jesus, who was born into our lives by that explosion of Love that has forever changed the course of our lives. His body, blood, soul and divinity, all coming together in Jesus, is at the heart of everything: our lives, creation and the cosmos.

His coming is an answer to Isaiah's plea in the first reading, "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down..." God did just that in Jesus. And Isaiah further reminds God that He is the potter and we are His clay, the work of His hands.

During Advent we awaken to a whole new world, the world of the Kingdom invading our own in quiet and inconspicuous ways. In each moment that we allow this Kingdom to have a place in our hearts, the Potter re-shapes and massages our hearts so that we become His flesh and blood...so that we become Christ.

When the world of the Kingdom takes root in our hearts, our own worlds experience a death of sorts because it means change, a change in how we see God, ourselves and others. The gospel writer Mark reminds us that we are to become doorkeepers, opening the door to Christ in the person of a homeless man who wanted some new underwear.