

**First Sunday of Advent – Year C
(Nov. 29, 2009)**

Jesus Is the Way

Has it ever struck you as strange that on this first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the Church's year, we are told to think about the end? Well it's not so strange if you consider this. When you take a trip or go on a journey you always begin by considering the end: where you are going. And then you plan the best way to get there. That is what the Church is proposing for us today.

The end of course is God and Jesus has told us that he is the way so it would seem that the best way to get there is to follow Jesus. How simple that seems and yet how difficult to do it. Might I propose that there are two reasons why it is so difficult to follow Jesus? The first is that we don't really trust the love of God and the second is that we don't really take Jesus seriously. Now I'm not trying to blame anybody or to hand out guilt trips. I am as hesitant to take Jesus seriously as anyone else. But like all of us I must at least try to trust God's love and try to take Jesus seriously.

What am I talking about? How often have we heard Jesus tell his disciples "Love one another as I have loved you."? When we think about that it's pretty awesome because Jesus loved us to death, quite literally, so if we are to love one another as he loved us we must be willing to die for one another. How often have we heard, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you"? And what's our immediate reaction? We begin to rationalize. Oh, he didn't really mean it; it's not realistic; if you live that way people will just take advantage of you; it's impossible; it was OK for people of his time, but it's ridiculous to think of living like that today, and so we just dismiss it and don't give it another thought.

Karl Rahner, the eminent Jesuit theologian, once said, "For the future we will all become mystics or we will all perish." What did he mean? What he meant was the simple fact that only the mystics really trust the love of God and really take Jesus seriously. When they hear something that seems absurd or impossible, their response is not rationalization, piling up reasons why it can't or shouldn't be done. Their response is "Yes" – yes,

like Mary when told she would be the Mother of the Messiah. We, practical people who understand the workings of the world, say, NO!

There are many examples of people who trusted God's love and took Jesus seriously. Think of Francis of Assisi who stripped himself naked in the town square, renounced his considerable material possessions, and went off to live a life of extreme poverty. Think of Ignatius of Loyola in his cave at Manresa who became so full of the love of God that he wanted to change the world and told his followers to go out and set the world on fire. Think of Mother Teresa of Calcutta picking up sick people on the streets and giving them a place to die with dignity. Think of our own Horace McKenna who devoted his life to the poor. They all trusted the love of God and they took Jesus seriously.

There are people who look at the awful things that are going on in our world today: endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and Israel; hunger and homelessness; anger and hatred being shouted from our televisions and radios; homicides on our streets; the inability of our Congress to come to a decent agreement on health care reform. People look at these things and they say that the Apocalyptic events described in the Gospel are already here and we are in the end time. Can Jesus' second coming be far away? Well, remember that Jesus told us no one knows when that will happen, not even himself. So the best thing to do is live each day as if it is our last and then we will always be ready.

How to be ready? First thing of course is to pray. Like Ignatius in his cave we must learn to listen to the Lord, we must become so filled with the love of God that we cannot *not* take Jesus seriously and do what he asks us to do no matter how absurd it might seem. We must learn to stop rationalizing and like the mystics say "Yes" to God. After all, the God who loves us so much will give us the strength to do it. Otherwise Jesus would not have asked us to.

As we begin this new liturgical year we begin once again to tell the story of Jesus, to hear his words and consider his actions, to ponder how we might live what he has asks us to do and we pray that this time, we might get it right. We might learn to respond as he asks us to. People have done it before and we can do it, too

And you know what? If we all did this, if we all learned to trust God's

love and to take Jesus seriously, most of this world's problems would disappear. Really! Just think about it. Just pray about it. Let's all pray that that God will help us to become mystics so that we can really trust God's love and take Jesus seriously.