

The vagaries of our calendar throw up some interesting variables at this time of the year. Just as one example, this year the 4th Sunday in Advent (today) falls a whole week before Christmas, giving us plenty of time to reflect on today's message. Next year, however, we will celebrate the 4th Sunday of Advent on Sunday 24th December, meaning that immediately after our Sunday morning services finish we will be frantically setting up the church for the Christmas Eve services of the afternoon and late evening! (A Sacristan's worst nightmare!) Not exactly the best context for completing our Advent journey well...

So let us make the most of this final week of the Advent season to reflect more on the complexity of this season, as we prepare for Christ's coming. As I was reminded during the week by the great Jesuit Theologian James Martin, one theme that is perhaps not a strong focus is that of Advent as *desire*. As Martin says, "Christians desire the coming of Christ into their lives in new ways, a desire that is heightened during Advent. The beautiful readings from the Book of Isaiah, which we hear during Advent, describe how even the earth longs for the presence of God. The Gospel readings tell of John the Baptist expressing Israel's hope for a Messiah. Mary and Joseph look forward to the upcoming birth of a son."

He goes on to explain: "Holy desires are different than surface wants, like "I want a new smartphone" or "I want a bigger office." Instead I'm talking about our deepest longings, those that shape our lives: desires that help us know who we are to become and what we are to do. Our deep longings help know God's desires for us, and how much God desires to be with us. And God, I believe, encourages us to "notice" and "name" these desires, in the same way that Jesus encouraged Bartimaeus, the blind beggar in the Gospels, to articulate his desire. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked the blind man sitting by the roadside. "Lord, I want to see," says Bartimaeus."

Desire is a key part of Christian spirituality because desire is a key way that God's voice is heard in our lives. And our deepest desire, planted within us, is our Advent desire for Christ, the "Dear Desire of the Nations."

Please take note of the various service times coming up in the next week, as well as advance notice for the next Ecumenical Eucharist, on the Feast of the Epiphany on the 6th January. May I also take this opportunity to thank Kathryn Watt for her ministry amongst us as Theological Student in 2016, and assure her of our prayers for her Retreat and Ordination on the 4th February, 2017.

May Thomas and all the Saints walk with you this week...

Sam