

How many of you enjoy having to wait? I don't. I often get impatient and don't like to wait. The problem is, you never know how long you'll have to wait. Minutes? Hours? Days? Maybe even longer.

**[Pause For Translation]**

That's a problem during Advent because Advent is a season of waiting. We know how long we have to wait until Christmas, Christ's first coming, but how long will we have to wait for Christ's *Second Coming*? Who knows?

**[Pause For Translation]**

So to get a better grip on waiting this Advent season, I've been trying to learn how to do it from some of history's most patient people, and one person who comes prominently to mind is St. Monica, so I thought she might be able to help me out.

**[Pause For Translation]**

You'll remember that St. Monica was St. Augustine's mother. Of course, she knew St. Augustine before he *was* "Saint" Augustine. She knew him for what he was during his adolescence and early adulthood, someone, in one delicately worded account, who led "a hedonistic and somewhat aimless life."<sup>1</sup>

**[Pause For Translation]**

So St. Monica prayed for his conversion. And prayed. And prayed some more. In fact she spent thirty years praying every day for Augustine's conversion.

**[Pause For Translation]**

She knew how to wait because she understood that things proceed according to the Lord's schedule, not ours, so she never gave up. And of course we all know the rest of the story: Augustine finally *was* converted, and went on to become a powerful herald of the Lord.

**[Pause For Translation]**

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<sup>1</sup> James Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 90.

Here's the thing that interests me about St. Monica. For thirty years, 11,000 nights, she went to bed knowing she'd have to wait at least another day. Did she think nothing was happening, that God just wasn't listening? Or did she have faith that *something* was happening even if she couldn't discern it yet?

**[Pause For Translation]**

Even if she couldn't perceive it yet, I'm pretty sure Monica had faith that something was happening. I'm willing to bet that Monica thought Augustine's conversion was at hand, even if "at hand" didn't necessarily mean "imminent," because she knew that time creeps along in two dimensions, as her son would later explain in some depth.

**[Pause For Translation]**

There's our usual, human sense of time — today is Sunday, tomorrow is Monday, and so on — and then there's God's sense of time — time marked by the unfolding of salvation. We measure our sense of time with a clock; God measures His with faith, and Monica was nothing if not faithful.

**[Pause For Translation]**

Monica was confident that God was simply having Augustine's conversion unfold in God's own time according to His own purposes. And so she was willing, as the Psalmist put it, to "wait for the Lord, take courage; be stouthearted, [and] wait for the Lord!"<sup>2</sup>

**[Pause For Translation]**

The things we think of only as future events may actually be present ones in God's eyes. That's important to keep in mind during Advent, because often when we hear the prophecies of Isaiah during Advent, for example, or hear Jesus describe what will happen when He returns, we often get confused.

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<sup>2</sup> Ps 27:14 (NAB).

Isaiah tells us that when the Messiah comes, “He shall strike the ruthless ... and ... slay the wicked,”<sup>3</sup> and Jesus told us in last week’s Gospel that “at the coming of the Son of Man ... two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake!”<sup>4</sup>

**[Pause For Translation]**

When we hear these things during Advent, we should bear a couple of things in mind. First, these things are prophecies and visions of what’s to come — they’re not depictions of what’s to come. And secondly, they involve the *meaning* of the kingdom to come, not the *manner* in which it will come.

**[Pause For Translation]**

For example, it isn’t necessarily that the Lord will come and point to one person and reject the other; it’s that one will notice Him when He comes and the other won’t, because one has always noticed Him and the other hasn’t.

**[Pause For Translation]**

One will follow Him and the other won’t, because one has always followed Him and the other hasn’t.

**[Pause For Translation]**

One will recognize that the world has finally turned upside down and the other won’t, because one knows that the world has been turning upside down since the Lord came the first time, and the other doesn’t.

**[Pause For Translation]**

How can we be sure of this? Monica’s example gives us the answer. Monica knew her son’s conversion was unfolding even though she couldn’t see it yet, but she knew she couldn’t

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<sup>3</sup> Isa 11:4 (NAB).

<sup>4</sup> Mt 24:40-42 (NAB).

just toss it in God's lap and be done with it. She still had to play her part in it. And her part was to pray. So she prayed, and prayed, and prayed some more.

**[Pause For Translation]**

It's the same with the coming of the Messianic kingdom. It's unfolding even now, but we can't just punt it over to God. All of us have a part to play in it. Our part begins with recognizing, as Peter did,<sup>5</sup> that God unfolds the history of salvation as He does and guides the building of His kingdom as He does because He doesn't want anyone to perish, but wants everyone, instead, to become part — an active part of — His kingdom.

**[Pause For Translation]**

"Everyone" means "everyone," so we're to invite everyone to join us (not just those whom we like), and we're to invite everyone to something specific, as Isaiah teaches us today. We're to invite everyone to experience in their own lives "a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord,"<sup>6</sup> and we do this, of course, by exhibiting these qualities ourselves.

**[Pause For Translation]**

We're to invite everyone to God's kingdom, a kingdom where the poor and oppressed receive the justice so often denied them by the powers and principalities of the secular world.<sup>7</sup> We're to invite them to that house, God's house, where our endless antagonisms, ancient and modern, personal and societal, have been relinquished<sup>8</sup> and where "one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."<sup>9</sup>

**[Pause For Translation]**

Our part in the coming of the kingdom is to help build it.

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Pet 3:8-9 (NAB).

<sup>6</sup> Isa 11:2 (NAB).

<sup>7</sup> Isa 11:4-5 (NAB).

<sup>8</sup> Isa 11:6-8 (NAB).

<sup>9</sup> Isa 2:4 (NAB).

**[Pause For Translation]**

Our part is to help build the kingdom of God's peace by becoming more peaceful people ourselves.

**[Pause For Translation]**

Christ's kingdom is taking shape even now. It's true that we'll have to wait for Jesus to bring it to its full fruition. It's also true that He's waiting for us, waiting for us to roll up our sleeves and lend a hand in building it.