

Our first reading today makes a promise: the Lord will come to save us. The second reading encourages us to be patient and persevere until the promise is fulfilled. In the gospel, Jesus tells John (and us) that the promise is being fulfilled in him. The things which Jesus mentions (the lame walking, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the dead rising) are all messianic signs meaning that the time for the fulfillment of the promise has arrived.

The psalm response (Lord, come and save us) is the prayer prayed by every generation from Adam and Eve up to today and it will be prayed by every generation until the end of time. Some might argue that Adam and Eve didn't pray that psalm—maybe not in those specific words, but that was the prayer in their hearts.

Sometimes we can be very scrupulous about praying in precisely the right words or in exactly the correct way. There are times when it is important to pray certain prayers in the correct way: the Mass is an example of that, but that is my problem to worry about, not yours. Although, it would be helpful if you didn't do things that distract me during the consecration of the Eucharist—turn off your cell phones, don't let your kids run around in the church, don't get up in the middle of the Eucharistic prayer. Traditional devotions such as the Rosary, when prayed in public, should also follow a recommended order, but even with the Rosary, there is flexibility in how it is prayed, even in public.

It is in our personal, private prayers that we can be overly scrupulous. It is as if we fear God won't answer our prayers if we don't get the words exactly right. Or it is as if we think that if we say the words in exactly the right way and order, God has to do what we want. That's not how prayer works. First, prayer is not about changing God. It changes us. Second, it is what is in our hearts that matters most. We may not know the right words to say to God in prayer, but he knows what is deepest in our hearts.

That Psalm response, "Lord come and save us," can be used in any time of trial whether we are battling temptation, during times of grief or fear, or in times of physical danger. It can also be a prayer calling on our Lord to come and solve the problems we see in the world around us. In that case, we have to remember that God takes care of things according to his own will and on his own timeframe which is often not the way we think things should be done. The reading we heard from James ended before James' recommendation that we persevere like Job, but Job is a good example for us in this time of patiently waiting for Jesus to return. Things in Job's life were not going the way he expected them to and he demanded answers from God. Then God showed up and started demanding

answers from Job, answers which Job was unable to provide. Job learned that he could not see things as God sees them; he learned he had to trust that God would bring about the best possible result. We also see this in the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis—what Joseph’s brothers intended for evil, God made work for the good. The greatest example of God’s ways not being our ways is Jesus himself. So much of what Jesus taught and did turned the established order of the world upside down; he even used his own death to conquer sin and death and gave us the possibility of eternal life with him in heaven.

The end-times orientation of the prayer, “Lord, come and save us,” fits in well with the first half of Advent which is focused on Jesus’ return in glory at the end of time. It should also remind us that if we are going to pray for Jesus’ return, we need to be prepared for that return. When was the last time you went to confession? According to the Catechism of the Church #2042, the second precept of the church is that we go to sacramental confession at least once a year. That is the minimum; more frequent confession can help us greatly in our fight against sin. Also we must go when we know we are in a state of mortal sin. At the very minimum we must go at least once a year. There are multiple opportunities between now and Christmas to go. There is a penance service with multiple priests on Monday in Medford, on Tuesday in Central Point, and on Wednesday in Grants Pass. Check the websites for those parishes for their schedules. We have not been offering penance services here because recent ones have been so poorly attended. Also, I will be here—on my own—Wednesday through Saturday for Confessions at various times according to the schedule that has been posted since Thanksgiving. The last opportunity for Confessions before Christmas will be Saturday. This late in the season, there could and should be long lines. Be prepared and be patient.

Beginning this Wednesday, we turn our attention from the unknown timing of Jesus’ return in glory to focus more intensely on his shockingly humble birth at Christmas. As we enter into these final days of preparation for Christmas, let us be intentional about making time to ponder everything the birth of Jesus means and may we grow in appreciation of everything Jesus has done for us.