

## **First Sunday of Advent – Cycle C – November 30, 2015**

A week from now, on December 8, Pope Francis will open the Holy Door of St. Peter's in Rome to begin a year of Mercy for the church. He has invited us to get beyond the thickets of judgment and conflict. "Mercy" is to be our nametag for the year, our passport to freedom from old wounds, unfinished business, resentments and revenge that have stifled us for too long. The opening of the bronze doors in Rome is a symbolic act. It ought to inspire us to open not just one door but perhaps many doors in our lives that lock in, or out, the healing experience of mercy. It is good we have a whole year to reflect on this deep challenge. WE need this time because change is hard.

Jesus in today's gospel saw that it would take an earthquake of new attitudes and the shaking of the heavens to bring forth the new creation out of the shell of the old. He told his disciples not to be afraid, but to stay awake, to be ready to move when crisis opens the way forward. Mercy is a revolution, for it changes the story. The landscape expands, mountains are razed, valleys filled in, a road appears in the wilderness. Stones are rolled back from old tombs, streams once blocked flow again, deserts bloom, and trees dormant or dead are laden with fruit.

It is our human condition to live always in the tension between failure and fulfillment, sin and salvation, trouble and hope. Yet here, precisely, we must be watchful and alert for the promises of God to be fulfilled.

Be watchful and alert, even in the worst of times, so as not to miss the best of times. We await mercy and redemption that only God can bring and will bring.

The promise of God might not be fully at hand, and in fact, there may be lots of evidence that everything around us is just falling apart. Even though the promise of God may still be on the way, we live reverently, deliberately, and fully awake – that is what it means to live in the promise of God, where the wait itself is almost as rich as its end. All it takes are some reminders, because as long as the promise is renewed, the promise is alive, as vivid as a rainbow, as real as the million stars overhead.

The invitation to the Holy Year of Mercy can put us, through Jesus, right up close to the face of God. That's a promise. May it be so for you and for me as we begin the holy season of Advent.