

I know a couple in their late 30s who have been unable to have children; they just filled out adoption papers in hopes of realizing their dreams. We all long for something. It may be better health, a more fulfilling relationship, or a better life for children. You may long for better grades in school or work that gives meaning to your week. We all have deep longings, and we get in touch with them during Advent.

The merchants of Christmas goods know that we have other longings, though these are not so deep. We are not so proud of them, but we long for a prettier home, a wider wardrobe, a better electronic toy, a car or a boat or a home such as the neighbors have. We want more expensive vacations and meals. The merchants of Christmas tempt us to indulge these passions as if they will fulfill or at least make us forget about our deeper longings for intimacy, real friendship or more devotion, even if it means going into debt, giving less to charities, or spending less time with God in service to others or prayer. All our longings are very real, so we need to evaluate what we long for and why.

The four weeks of Advent commemorate 4000 years of waiting between the promise of a Savior and the fulfillment of that promise in Jesus Christ. Most of us have trouble waiting four minutes for service, much less 4000 years.

Our longings are not always fulfilled immediately. Some people wait for a child; others do not even find real love until late in life; you cannot develop musical or athletic skills without years of practice. Some things take time.

While we wait, we need encouragement. We need to know that all will be well. St. Paul realized that the Christians in Rome were in that situation. Jesus had said, "Love one another," but it was getting hard for them to do so. They harbored prejudices. Jews and Gentiles did not get along with one another for thousands of years. Now they were worshiping God together in Jesus Christ. It sounds beautiful, but it didn't all go smoothly. You can't just suddenly start worshiping with people you have despised all your life. It takes a lot out of you to do this. But worship and community go together, and authentic worship demands authentic respect.

Paul encouraged the Romans with this reminder: Think about the Bible, he said. It was written for our instruction and to give us hope. Jesus fulfilled the promises God made to the patriarchs of old. God followed through on those promises precisely so that Jew and Gentile could worship together 4000 years later. There will be difficulties, but when you remember God's vision for us, it will give you hope.

Whenever our longings get the best of us, whenever we despair about realizing our best dreams, turn to the Bible and remember the people who waited an even longer time. Their hopes were fulfilled. And ours will be too.