

2nd Sunday of Advent

I recently ordered an upgraded electronic device online. A few days later the delivery service left a note on my mailbox that they did not leave the product because it required an adult signature, and no one was around. As the week progressed, they left me five such notices. I contacted the original company, where a customer service agent reassured me, “That product does not require an adult signature.” The agent agreed to file a complaint against the delivery service and send a new device. Well, that one didn’t arrive either. I called customer service again. An agent told me, “Oh, we canceled your order and refunded your money. Did you still want this product?” I said, “Yes, and two weeks have passed since I ordered and paid for the device.” The agent then appeared to read from a script: “Sir, I know how frustrating it is to spend money and not get something in return. I don’t like it when that happens to me.” There are times I get impatient. This really wasn’t one of them. I was more puzzled than angry, but customer service for any company knows that in the United States, if, as a customer, you don’t get service, you have your own script to follow: You get angry, you might swear, you might demean the person on the phone who had nothing to do with the inconvenience. In our culture, this is how we’re supposed to act at any delay.

Advent confronts us with delay. This time of year prepares us not only for Christmas, the historical entry of Jesus into world history, but it also prepares us for his Second Coming. In New Testament passages such as today’s second reading, we learn that after Jesus died, his followers expected him to come back right away. But he hadn’t. So, they wondered, “What’s the delay?” Customer service replied in the form of the Second Letter of Peter. Peter reminds us God operates on a different schedule than we do: one day to us takes a thousand years for him, and mysteriously one thousand years to us feels like a day to him. What feels like a delay to you, probably doesn’t feel that way to God. Besides, God has a specific reason for what you may experience as a delay. This applies anytime we think God should act more quickly—finding you a job, bringing world peace, or delivering an electronic device. Peter writes, the Lord “is patient with you.” God is not delaying because he’s busy doing something else or taking a break from answering prayers. God is waiting for something within you to change. Peter continues, God does not wish “that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” The time between now and the Second Coming of Christ allows personal renewal. Peter concludes, “since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.”

We grow impatient with other people, some of whom are dangerous. We may wish they were just gone. This is why some people want the death penalty, why others train for war, and why others wish a former lover would fall off the edge of the earth. But God’s desire is not annihilation even of the worst sinners. God’s desire is conversion. He delays. He gives people a chance to change. When we are unable to forgive someone, the prayer we best offer is not for their elimination, but for their change of heart. God invites us to join him in wishing not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Advent invites us to repent our sinful ways, and to join with God in praying for the repentance of all, eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.

Sunday, December 10, 2023