

1st Sunday of Advent

At this time of year, we should be thinking about giving thanks, decorating the home, shopping for loved ones, singing carols, and rejoicing with some embarrassment over impossible football victories. But I've started reading another book about baseball. I share the illusion of many other baseball fans that there is no offseason. The book is one author's highly opinionated selection of the 100 greatest players in the history of the game, ranked in reverse order. I got stuck near the beginning at number 95, Tony Gwynn. The author opens that chapter with a haiku on hitting based on an actual quote. You remember: a haiku is a poem of seventeen syllables in three lines. I found this one a perfect beginning for Advent. Imagine Tony Gwynn after a multi-hit game, explaining his approach at the plate with this meditative haiku. Ready? Here it goes: "I tried not to guess. I did not anticipate. I trusted my eyes." That's how Tony Gwynn hit so successfully. He waited. He trusted. He exercised a disciplined way to hope.

Our Advent bible passages today feature a responsorial psalm that expresses trust: "To you, O Lord, I lift my soul." Psalm 25 also includes this declaration to the Lord: "I have hoped in you all day long."

In my childhood, hope was a defining virtue for the month of December. We hoped for snow. We hoped for relatives to come visit. We hoped for presents under the tree. All those hopes had a specific end in mind. They weren't hopes as much as they were wants. They were specific things we wanted to have or wanted to have happen.

Advent offers a different kind of hope. It recalls the hopes of thousands of years, generation after generation hoping for a Savior to come. But they didn't trust their eyes. When Jesus was born in a manger, he came in poverty and humility. He wasn't the Savior they wanted. But he was the Savior they hoped for.

When Psalm 25 has us pray to the Lord, "I have hoped in you all day long," it opens a door for God to choose how to respond, how to fulfill that hope the best. It doesn't pray, "O God, I want this and that." No, it expresses hope, and then in a kind of abandonment it offers the words we sang as our refrain today, "To you, O Lord, I lift my soul." I have these hopes, including the hope that you know what is best. So I lift my soul to you.

That's why I found this haiku on hitting so inspiring. At the plate, Gwynn focused not on what he wanted, but on what he had. He had an idea, but it was up to the pitcher to deliver the specific invitation to the way he would respond. You and I—we are up to bat every day of our lives, as we stand awaiting the next pitch that God sends our way. There is no offseason. If we want a specific pitch, we may swing and miss at the ball that comes sailing over the plate. But if we lift our souls, trusting that God has what we need and will deliver that, then we can more easily hope in the Lord all day long. We can hit.

When we think about what we hope for, and what God provides, blessed are those who can declare this at the end of the day: "I tried not to guess. I did not anticipate. I trusted my eyes."