

1st Sunday of Advent
Year B

I looked out my window early this morning and it was still dark. What I saw in the window across the street was a Christmas Tree aglow with lights of all colors. And I thought to myself, "Don't they know that it's only Advent? We have a ways to go before Christmas?" But really what's the point. Everything around us sings and shouts of Christmas. Parties, presents, trees and trimmings. Now don't get me wrong. I start thinking about Christmas in October when rehearsals begin for Christmas Revelations. It's just that we don't want to miss the gifts of Advent in anticipation of the gifts of Christmas. So let's have a little of each:

Sing "On the first day of Advent my true love gave to me, a clay pot, a gift for you and me"

The prophet Isaiah uses the beautiful image of God's people as clay in the potter's hand. But I wonder how malleable are we? How willing are we to be molded and shaped in the image of Jesus? Advent is a time to let ourselves BE remade/remolded/reshaped. There are people here today who are deliberately choosing to be molded and shaped in the image of Jesus. They are our catechumens seeking Baptism and other seeking to finish their Christian Initiation.

And what about the rest of us? What can we do to let ourselves be Clay in the potter's hands? Well here's something that might help us. There's something in the jar of clay. It's a scroll. It says it's for the B Cycle of readings. It says that during this Advent season we should

Be Attentive, Bold, Creative, Daring, Empowered, Forgiving, Generous, Hopeful, Inspired, Just (Just Be) Kind, loving, merciful, Nice/ not naughty, Open, Positive, Quiet, reverent, Sincere, Truthful, Uplifted, Vigilant, Watchful, Xavierific, Yourself, Zealous as St Francis Xavier was.

There are fewer than 26 days left before Christmas but perhaps each of the 23 days remaining you could find a way of "Being".

The following is a beautiful reflection that was sent to me by The Women Who Stayed.

I am invited to share my voice, a call that both entices and terrifies me. For starters, as a Catholic woman (60+ years) I have never been asked to contribute in this way. For this reason, I am accustomed to keeping my spirituality in a place that is safe and guarded. While writing that comes from the “head” comes easily, writing from the *heart* challenges me to express myself in a way that is vulnerable and open to criticism. As an academic, I was told early in my graduate training that in science, *we do not feel; we think*. As if feeling could be divorced from thinking, I accepted this rhetoric and wrote only about ideas that could be supported with empirical evidence. But now, I embrace this opportunity to share in the ongoing dialogue started by *The Women Who Stayed*.

In the first reading for Sunday, December 3rd, Isaiah likens us to clay in the potter’s hand. I love this metaphor because it defines human interaction with the Divine. Clay is not an impassive substance. Clay is drawn from the earth. It consists of molecules that respond to the forces of wind, fire, water, and manipulation. The possibilities of formation in the hands of a master potter are endless. Yet, the potter also listens to the clay.

If God is the potter, and I am the clay, then where does gravity fit in? I see the forces of gravity as my will. When my actions coincide with God’s will, my spirit is free to move closer to God. Yet at other times, my disregard for God’s plan get in the way. On those occasions, I become cracked and broken. Each time that happens, I am offered another chance to be recreated in the hands of the almighty potter.

Before creating a pot, the potter centers a mass of clay on the wheel. Without prior centering, spiritual growth is stymied just as the creation of a pot is hindered. Yet, there are times when I feel off-center. I worry about my family members and friends. Sometimes I react defensively at some perceived affront. Whenever this happens, I feel as though gravity is pulling me off-center. When I share my troubles with Jesus, I feel God’s loving hands bringing me back on course, shaping my sense of gratitude for the many blessings in my life.

The potter and the clay are mutually entangled in the dance of creation. The potter constantly works *with* and *against* the forces of gravity to bring the clay upward transforming it into a unique vessel. By keeping an open heart, I allow the Spirit into my life to shape what is to come.

The second reading calls us to be grateful. I look back on how my life has changed over the past 50 years with gratitude. My transition from high school dropout and seeker of empty promises to becoming what I consider to be a contributing member of society constitutes nothing short of a miracle. I know that God's presence in my life shaped my path and eventually steered me in the right direction. Being cognizant of the power and constancy of the Spirit brings me strength and courage to live the life I am destined to lead.

I see the hands of God at work in moving our church closer toward the full inclusion of women. After debating with friends about the merits and drawbacks of remaining Catholic, I realized that I had two options. The first was to leave and join a related religion that seemed to better appreciate women. The other was to remain and work for change. I opted for the second, and am grateful to SFX for providing me with the people and actions that are part of a Divine plan to bring justice to a broken world.

I am grateful for the privilege of serving as a Eucharist minister. Though the idea of volunteering had often crossed my mind, I thought I was too busy to take on a regular commitment. But just as water dissolves clay, the mental obstacles I had created, melted away when I was invited to serve by a fellow parishioner. As a child, my first holy communion truly was a special time when I thought my heart would burst with joy. It wasn't only about the pretty dress, beaded missal, and glow-in-the-dark plastic white rosary beads - though I thought they were pretty cool at the time. There was more. At that moment, I truly felt changed and one with the body of Christ. My first experience serving as a Eucharistic minister at SFX inspired those same feelings.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells us to be watchful.

I interpret this to mean that we are to remain vigilant and aware of the evils surrounding us. After reading a fellow-parishioner's account, I accompanied Seafarers International to visit immigrants detained at the Elizabeth Detention Facility. It was there that I met a young man from Jamaica who had come to this country at the age of 18. The young man had been detained at a point when he was disconnected from friends and family. He was vulnerable and falling through the cracks of justice because he was also poor and black. The visit startled me into thinking about the vast number of detainees currently behind bars, and the iniquities of privately-owned detention facilities that benefit from keeping people incarcerated.

Each of these readings stirred feelings of excitement and anticipation of a just world ahead when we remain open to God's presence in our lives.

Peggy Jacobson moved to Queens five years ago and started searching for a parish where she felt at home. Somehow, she started receiving emails about speakers and book discussions at Xavier. Even though it seemed like a long trek, she was inspired by what she witnessed, and felt welcomed each time she came. After joining the parish two years ago, Peggy continues to be moved by the vibrant spirit of Xavier.