

ASASV December 2020 Meeting

Reflection by Christopher Doyle

This week, as we know, is the first week of the new liturgical year. It marks the beginning of one journey and the end of another. What a road we have been on since we set out on that journey this time last year! Amid COVID, lockdowns, and quarantines, some have very sadly died. Many more have fallen sick. Our lives have changed in ways we could not have imagined. It is likely that for each of us it has been difficult at times to find God in the middle of all this, or to understand what a kind and loving God could possibly be doing.

In his second letter (2 Pt. 3: 8-15a), St. Peter instructs his followers about the delay of the second coming and that for God, “one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day”.

During this past year, some days have felt like a thousand years. For me that was the day that Paul died.

When I was seconds away from the hospital, the nurse called to tell me that Paul had passed away five minutes prior. I could hear that “mighty roar” of all my hopes and dreams “passing away” and all my earthly concerns being “dissolved by [the] fire” of the Holy Spirit. The “thief” had come when I was just seconds away.

Then there was the wake when, because of the inclement weather and COVID, many people who wanted so much to come could not. I was left with Paul’s brother and sister-in-law whose presence made me uncomfortable. That night felt like a thousand years.

I have experienced maddening delay of the things I have waited for in my life. Because most of my impatient days are behind me now that I am older, I have learned that waiting for things can be rewarding. Someone wise once told me that when we think God is saying “no”, he is saying to us, “yes, but something better”.

Many of these answered prayers came to me in the form of a person. The angel in the disguise of a hospital employee who prayed over me the morning Paul died just minutes before I went to visit him for the last time.

A realtor I met through a colleague at school reminded me of an angel as well; the unique way that she dressed, her simple but inspiring office which felt like an oasis

in the desert, and her presence in my home gave me a welcoming feeling of trust. The two appraisers I met through her who come to clean out your home, donate what can be salvaged, and buy from you what has great value, could not have come at a better time. Someone had come along, an investor from a real estate company and wanted to offer me cash for the house. When I consulted with my realtor, she told me that she wanted to get me the best price for my home. I told her that if I must wait a few months for that to happen, I would because I trust that God's will always involves something better.

As frightened as that morning of Oct. 26 was, it was also a day of tremendous blessing. I had never witnessed anything so beautiful as a dear friend's death. Paul had prepared me for this day in ways I will never understand. Somehow, he knew his time on earth was limited. He was devoted to me and I had devoted much time to him. And I have learned that devotion, which is just another word for attention, results in holiness. When we turn our hearts toward the God in ourselves and in others, we are practicing devotion and we experience the holiness that is the grace of God alone. I gave everything I had to Paul and he gave everything to me in return, without either of us counting the cost.

This devotion is practiced through the experience of God's telescopic focus—a day being like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day. At the same time, by practicing devotion and holiness, we are both waiting with anticipation for the coming of the Lord and hastening his coming. The heavens, the things we aspire to, our ideals and beliefs which we hold dear, will all come crashing down and be consumed by the fire of the Holy Spirit. The elements, our physical treasures, will cease to possess us, as they will also be consumed by that same fire, and we will live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. This is *our* advent, and this day of the Lord is our true desire.

There will be no more hiding, lying, or cheating. Nothing will be done in secret anymore because all will be brought to the light. As much of a curse as technology can be, it has also been a blessing for the way in which corruption and greed have been exposed. The righteous will be vindicated. This day of the Lord, for which when we were children were taught to practice patience, finally seems to be in sight. This second coming, this rebirth of the soul, is an experience which we will all have before we pass away. We keep our eyes and hearts fixed on the God who loves and saves us. If we believe it, we will see it.

I was prepared for Paul's death in this way. And now I am dealing with the aftermath, a house full of treasures amid mountains of clutter. When the cleaning and appraising are done, the clutter will have dissolved and only the treasures will remain.

So, all this waiting we do is in fact salvation. God gives us more and more time to focus our love and attention on Him for His glory only. And look at all the wonderful gifts that arrive. All during childhood I longed for friends, and now I have friends who are more treasured than jewels. I realize that my grandmother was right once again when I used to complain to her about time moving by so slowly: "Just wait till you are older". Looking back, I feel that my years have passed by like a day, yet in those days of loneliness, this day always felt like it was a thousand years away. This the day we have been waiting for, my friends. This is the day of salvation.