

We begin Advent, the liturgical season which prepares us for the coming of the Lord, both on the last day and on the day of his birth. Just for a change with this change of season, let me substitute a brief period of prayer in place of the usual homily. Let us use the text of the first reading for today taken from Isaiah. It is on p. 32 of the missalette.

We put ourselves in the presence of God. Yes, we are in church, but we are easily distracted. So we may make a conscious effort to place ourselves before God. Of course, God is already there waiting for us to turn our attention to Him. He is always there. It is with our living in God's presence as it is with our living in the atmosphere. We are unaware of living in it until our air lines are shut off. So too we are unaware of living in God until we are given the grace that this is the case and we then turn our attention to Him. We are in God's presence. Indeed, God surrounds us as an ocean surrounds a swimmer.

O God, we adore You, You who are the creator of the universe. And now, to our astonishment, we dare to call you Father. We are so small and You are so great. Yet you tell us to call you Father. We thank you, Father.

Now with the prophet Isaiah we say: Why do you let us wander from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Certainly, it is true that we wander from your ways. Forgive us, we beg you. But do you harden our hearts? Is it not rather that our hearts become hard because we wander from your ways? And yet we cannot find our way back to you unless you help us. And so, even if You do not harden our hearts, even if we do that ourselves, You, and only You, can soften them. So we pray: Turn our hearts to you. Make them soft, pliant, so that we will feel your presence upon us. Lord, we ask for this grace.

Father, Isaiah asks you to do again what You did for your people in the past when You tore open the heavens and made the mountains quake. Our requests are more modest. Or are they? We ask you to tear open the mountains of coldness and indifference towards you which we feel in our hearts and make our hearts quake in your presence.

Now Isaiah says that “no ear has ever heard, no eye has ever seen any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for Him. Here Isaiah betrays a world very different from our world, a world of many gods, and he is saying that only You, the one true God, have ever done such deeds. Father, we live in a world where

people worship you or nothing at all—or themselves in place of You. Father, help us to find you and praise You. Don't let us drift off into worship of ourselves or of nothing at all.

Father, many years after Isaiah the apostle Paul would paraphrase Isaiah's words in his first Letter he wrote to the Christians in the Greek city of Corinth. He wrote: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him." He believes that in Jesus you have given us your very own spirit who now dwells in our minds and hearts so that we can think your thoughts and love with your love. Oh, Father, let us be more and more aware of the fact that we are one with you in your Son Jesus, that in being part of him we are also part of you because You and he are one. Father, let us realize this as we dare to eat the bread of the Eucharist, the body and blood of Your Son.

All praise to you, Father, in your son Jesus and through your holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts. Amen.