

1

Though we are in the season of Lent, I confess that my favorite season of the Church year is Advent. My preference probably comes from memories of my childhood and the anticipation I enjoyed knowing that Christmas would soon arrive.

“What do you boys want for Christmas?” my mother would ask. The question sent my younger brother Kevin and me racing to Sears & Roebuck’s mammoth catalogue. This, of course, was before Google, before Amazon, when the only comprehensive place to shop from home was the Sears & Roebuck catalogue. It had everything: clothes for women, clothes for men; power tools, appliances, dishes, and much more. But my brother Kevin and I flipped right to our hearts’ delight, the pages of toys. Every toy then in existence was pictured on those pages. Kevin and I would lay on our tummies on the rug in front of the big living-room window, the warm morning sun pouring in on a cold December morning, and

2

search the pages, circling with a pencil every toy that promised delight.

Today's gospel urges us to ask; to raise our hopes and desires to God—just like a child. Many places through the scriptures we are urged to approach God as a child. But why? Young children are honest. Children don't worry about how their desires might be judged. They don't question the "appropriateness" of their wants or try to conform to what they think others might expect, as adults do.

We must be honest in our prayer: ask for exactly what we want. The apostles did this— "Give my sons the seats on your left and your right," said the mother of the apostles James and John. "Let this cup pass," Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. Honest as little children—unreserved, unrestricted, unashamed. Jesus calls God, "Abba," which means "daddy." Jesus Himself approaches God as a child.

3

This is so important. The things we want, those deep desires, create our identity, shape the person we are. Our identity flows from our desires. Such honest prayer, this offering of our true desires to God, allows God to enter into them, speak to them, understand them, reconcile them. Giving them to God, gives the Lord permission to re-arrange them and gently, gradually make them more like His own.

This is just what we are about in the Eucharist. We ask Jesus to make us like Him. We receive the Body of Christ to become the Body of Christ, to become in the world the face and hands of Christ. We can be transformed in this way because Christ places within us his own desires, and then we see the world as Christ sees it.

As my brother Kevin and I circled all the pictures of toys in the Sears & Roebuck Catalogue, we actually had no idea what would arrive on Christmas day. It might have been that dreaded present—*feared by all children*—sensible socks.

4

In a similar way, not knowing, we write our prayers on little slips of paper and place them in a box. What might come of them, we don't know. What gift of grace might God give us, we do not know.

In this we are not unlike Francis Xavier himself: sent to the Portuguese colony on a single day's notice, he was surprised by success in India. Later, new stories of a distant nation drew him to Japan, and finally, rumors of an even greater nation, to the doorstep of China. None of this was foreseen. Xavier trusted and gave himself over to the unknowable mystery of God.

We send our prayers off on their voyage to God.

Not knowing what the answer will be.

Not knowing when they might come back.

Not knowing how we will be changed in the asking.

5

Kevin and I never knew what would show up Christmas morning, but that was never a worry. Because the truth that we did know was the love and wisdom of our parents.

When we send our simple, honest desires off to God, we don't know how they will be answered but we trust in the love and wisdom of God. In some way God will fashion an answer to our prayer, and that answer will surpass our expectations and make us more like Jesus.