Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Advent 2025 Year A

Advent is above all else a special time of waiting, so the advice of Saint James in today's second reading is very timely, “Be patient” he says, “until the Lord’s coming”.

Would it be fair to say that part of the problem of modern man is that patience is in short supply? We do not know how to wait and so we tend to celebrate feasts differently than we used to.

In times gone by there was generally a long fast leading up to a feast, and then a joyous celebration. But today it is often a long celebration leading up to the feast and then it's the fast afterwards!

Christmas exemplifies this perfectly. At least a month before the feast the celebrations start; the decorations and the lights go up; the cards go out; the parties begin, and the Christmas music begins to play.

By the time Christmas Day itself comes around we are exhausted. We are satiated by the specialness of the season and over-saturated with celebration and ready to move on back to ordinary life. It has been fun and exciting, but we've had our fill of partying, lights, special music, and Turkey dinners, and now we feel the need to fast.

It is a curious reversal because traditionally the build-up was towards the feast and the celebrations came afterwards; today the feast is first and all the fast comes afterwards.

A friend of mine recently remarked that one of the problems of our society is that we certainly know how to anticipate an event, but then we do not know how to sustain it.

There is a lot of truth in that, but there's even more truth I think in the criticism that it is not so much the problem of knowing how to sustain something, it is more a question of not knowing how to properly anticipate something.

We confuse anticipation with celebration itself. Waiting, longing, and fasting are no longer our strong points, but then neither is feasting. Because we cannot properly build towards a feast, we cannot celebrate that feast either. We need to rediscover the virtue of patience, and experience the truth once more that to feast, we must first fast; that to taste the specialness of something, we must first have a sense of what is ordinary.

Most of us here will have very vivid memories of the strict Lent and Advent of our childhoods. Those were seasons of fast and renunciation.

There were no weddings, no dances, fewer parties, fewer drinks, fewer sweets and desserts, generally less of everything that constitutes specialness and celebration. There were no flowers in the church, and all statues were covered up in purple. The colours were dark, and the mood was sombre and penitential. However, the feasts that followed, be they Easter or Christmas, were oh so special, because of what preceded them.

Experience should have taught us by now that we need to learn once more how to be patient and to anticipate properly.

When we short circuit the fasting and the prerequisite sense of longing and waiting, how can Christmas be so special when we arrive at the 25th of December exhausted from weeks of Christmas parties? How can Easter be special if we treat Lent like any other season?

Advent is therefore a special invitation by the church to encourage us to slow down and learn how to wait and anticipate the feast of Christmas properly.

To immerse ourselves in the inexhaustible spirit of waiting and longing in the writings of generations of profits used in all the readings of the five weeks of Advent. To fast properly that we might feast properly.

Christmas is no longer special if we have celebrated it right throughout Advent. But if in those five weeks we learn to patiently wait, to yearn, to fast, and to anticipate with the mind and the heart of the Church, then the feast, when it eventually arrives, is so much more enjoyable, both materially and spiritually because of it.