

Delaying Gratification

1st Sunday Advent (Year C)

December 2, 2018

Fr. Tony Davis

Dr. M. Scott Peck in his book *The Road Less Traveled* tells the story of meeting with a 30 year old financial analyst who was complaining about her tendency to procrastinate at work over the previous few months. Even after going through the typical reasons for losing motivation and not getting anywhere, he finally asked her, "Do you like cake?" This must have sounded so off topic, but after she said "of course," he asked her what her favorite part of the cake was. She responded, "the frosting." To that, she said that when she eats cake, she eats the frosting first.

As it turns out, this woman discovered that at work, just like how she eats cake, she does the most gratifying parts of the job first. Then, for the remaining 6 hours of the work day she has to do all the less desirable tasks. Because she doesn't enjoy these things, she has developed the habit of procrastinating.

Finally, Dr. Peck suggested to her that she not do all the gratifying tasks right away, but spend the first hour each day doing these less desirable tasks. Then, throughout the rest of the day, she can do some of the more gratifying things. Upon following this advice, she found herself no longer procrastinating.

I share this story in connection to us entering into the Christmas season. This can be a very fun time- gifts, decorating, parties, traditions, spending time with family, and cake. But, at least in our Church, we still have a whole other season before our Christmas season: the 4 week season of Advent.

Advent teaches us to wait, anticipate, and most importantly, delay our gratification. It is a time for doing the hard part first. In the words of our Gospel from *Luke*, it gives us time to see if 'our hearts have become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of life.' Some good questions to reflect upon during this Advent season are: am I patient or compulsive? Do I realize that good things usually take time? What are the full implications of God becoming human? If we jump into Christmas too soon, by the time Christmas comes, we will be so sick of it that we will

be ready for it to be over. The birth of Christ will be something just to get through, not something to celebrate.

Going back to Dr. Peck, he says that delaying gratification “is the only decent way to live.” Life cannot be all pleasure. We have to space out our pleasures so that we don’t get stuck in our pain.

This Advent season challenges us to delay our gratification for Christmas.

Am I usually sick of Christmas by December 25? As we enter into this holiday season, let us appreciate the waiting, for the greater the waiting, the greater the celebration will be.