

Gaudete Sunday
12/17/17

Here we are two-thirds of the way through our Advent journey and what do we have to show for it? Have we taken time to step away from the busyness and craziness and frantic pace that retailers want us to keep? Have we taken time for our family and our friends and ourselves? And I don't mean making appearances at Christmas parties. Often those just add to the hectic pace. Sure, they're fun or we wouldn't go. But to squeeze them all in can sometimes be a problem in and of itself.

I want to take us away from the commercial Advent for a few moments. Imagine that we boarded a train bound for the west coast two weeks ago on the First Sunday in Advent. For those of you who've had the privilege of riding trains, they can be a lot of fun. Or they can cause some difficulty. I vividly recall taking the train from St. Paul to Chicago when I was a freshman at St. Thomas. Some of us had decided to have a few cocktails on the way and since we weren't old enough to buy drinks in the club car, we created our own. Well, you may be starting to get the picture of what happened. I had my share as well as the shares of a couple buddies and by the time we got to the station outside of Chicago, I was one sick young man. And my waiting mom and girlfriend lost a lot of their excitement when they took a look at me.

Well, back to our present train ride. Lots of times, trains take people where they would otherwise not go, because the tracks carve their way through mountains and across valleys on paths meant only for them.

Imagine, we're sitting peacefully on the train, watching the landscape change as we roll by. We'll pass fields of grain and corn and herds of cattle and cows. We'll see pretty much everything that makes this country survive. And then we'll get to the Rockies, some of the most beautiful scenery God created. Maybe we'll go through a tunnel in Glacier Park. And finally we'll arrive at our destination.

During our trip, there will be some bumpy tracks and some smooth tracks and some incredible sights that will bring us great joy. Similarly, the Church inserts this Gaudete Sunday, this rejoicing Sunday into our Advent journey, as a reminder that we should be joyful at the prospect of the impending celebration of Christ's birth, as well as the prospect of His Second Coming. Our time of waiting will not be for naught.

I hope by now you're seeing the connection between a train ride and Advent because I think they are very similar. You see, in Advent, and in life in general, our scenery changes. Whether the journey lasts three weeks and a day or a number of years, we'll cross plains and valleys and do our best to get across mountains.

Author Geoff Wood says that on our train ride, life becomes for all of us a narrow corridor of habit, set on wheels that convey us through time, equipped with windows through which we can catch a glimpse of passing years, a passing landscape, of other people. Until, thank God, we slow down enough to arrive at a station called Christmas, where we at least have a chance to stick our heads out the window and see the Virgin Mary "flushed with the glow of morning," offering us a nourishment more profound than any dining car could provide: her newborn son who is destined to become our Eucharistic bread and wine.

But Wood wonders if we really allow ourselves the time to savor this season of spiritual sunrise? Do we arrive in Bethlehem refreshed or exhausted? And do we stay long enough to allow Christmas to do for us what it did for the angels and shepherds?

We have barely one more week to slow down, which some may be saying will be impossible. Really? Isn't that up to us? Let's give ourselves the authority to take back Advent and arrive at the station called Christmas refreshed instead of weary, invigorated instead of worn out, full of the Spirit instead of drained of all our energy. Wouldn't that make for a beautiful Christmas?