

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (12/6-7/2008)

*Isaiah 40/1-11, Psalm 85, 2 Peter 3/8-14, Mark 1/1-8*

December 7, 1941 was a day that will live in infamy, as President Roosevelt phrased it. As most Americans know, on that day, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, seriously impaired our naval power in the Pacific theater and propelled us into World War II. Shortly thereafter, Nazi Germany declared war on the U.S. In an unexpected way, those days in early December of 1941 marked the emergence of the U.S. from the Great Depression (the shadow of which hangs over our heads today.) With its forced entry into war, isolationist America was to become the predominant power in the geopolitical world for the next 60 plus years. New beginnings, beginnings that carried the very real specter of a great deal of pain and suffering, and also some hope and optimism.

On this 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that day, on this the second weekend of Advent, the Scripture readings are appropriately enough concerned with new beginnings. The Lord God speaks in *Isaiah* about new beginnings for His exiled Jewish people. *“Go up on a high mountain...Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God. Here comes with power the Lord God who rules by His strong arm.”* The passage goes on to say that the Lord God, shepherd that He is, will feed His flock, gather them in His arms and lead them with care. Can you even imagine how comforting those words were to the downtrodden Jewish people trudging back from exile?

In the second reading from 2 Peter, we hear: *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar.”* The Day of the Lord is coming, declares the apostle, and we better be ready. His words put us on notice that there will be a new world, a world of change and anticipation.

The Gospel message, while seemingly matter-of-fact, announces *“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* A whole world of meaning is summed up in that introduction. It's the beginning of the reign of God in Jesus. Watch out for the good news that will be carried by this man from Galilee, Jesus the Christ. His words, his actions, his death and resurrection will change the world, change our world.

As I write this essay, I recall my own childish excitement on Dec. 7 and 8 in 1941. Naïve and uninformed as I was, I welcomed the excitement of the war; little did I understand the true cost that would have to be paid. And little did I know of the new world I would be growing up into during the next decades. When Jesus came to bring the message of good news from the Father, he paved the way for a new way of living, a new way of seeing this world of ours. It is God's domain, God's creation – we are participants in that divine action to this very day. We don't know what it holds for us, but let us enter into this newness full of confidence in God's presence, full of hope in God's future and fully determined to work for peace.