

**December 3, 2017 An Old Latin Hymn Homily:** Brothers and sisters, in the not too distant past a Roman Catholic was likely to hear Christian hymns in the traditional language of the Church, Latin. In the season of Advent one of the more popular hymns was *Rorate Caeli Desuper*, the words of which were undoubtedly inspired by the prophet Isaiah, "That you would tear the heavens open and come down, with the mountains quaking before you" (Is.63:19). In anticipation of the mystery of the incarnation, it was usually sung on the fourth Sunday of Advent. The hymn gives expression to the longings of patriarchs and prophets... and symbolically of the Church... for the coming of the Messiah, the one foretold by the messengers of God to bring salvation and deliverance to His people.

Recall the reference to the great article of our faith found in the Apostles' Creed: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven"

The background of today's first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah is worth noting. In the early fifth century before the birth of Christ, the Jews had returned to their homeland after a long period in exile. The Temple lay in ruins and many of the Lord's chosen had failed to reform their ways. Isaiah's prophecy is a cry of hope and longing for the coming of God. It seemed for the heavens were closed. God did not speak. He was silent and absent. The faithful Jew hoped for Divine intervention from on high, and that God would come near to his people yet again.

We begin Advent by recalling the long darkness endured by the human race. Many are still in it. The experience of the Jewish people during centuries of waiting is really not so different from the lives of those around us, who live without the consolation of faith and hope.

The Nobel laureate and concentration camp survivor, Elie Wiesel, writes poignantly of the Jewish people's remarkable patience and their extraordinary witness in face of centuries of oppression. Even today, many Orthodox Jews await the coming of the Messiah. In his fine book, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and legends of Hasidic Masters*, he writes of an anguished prayer offered by one Rabbi Moshe. The great man waited his whole life for the Messiah; he never went to bed at night without reminding his sons: "If he comes, wake me right away". This is how he spoke to God: "Master of the universe, my strength is gone; I am exhausted. You must send us the Messiah. You have no choice. Don't think that I am asking this for my own salvation. If you wish, I am willing to deny myself even a single ray of light and joy. Believe me, I am ready to sacrifice my life and my soul and undergo the terrors of eternal night if that be the price of Israel's redemption."

The late president of the University of Notre Dame, Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, once wrote an introduction to a book written by Wiesel on the Hasidic masters published by the University's publishing house. He offers an interesting perspective on the importance of "waiting". He writes, "In these lectures it makes little difference that the Jew waits for the Messiah while the Christian waits for the Messiah's Second Coming. Both wait. It is the human condition. It demands a difficult and balanced response. Jew and Christian can learn much from each other about the proper way to wait".

In the first two weeks of Advent, we are reminded that Christ will come again in glory, his second and last coming. "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

Let us be brutally honest with ourselves. We are not a patient people. We demand "Fast food", "instant coffee", "speed dials", "Jiffy lube" and "one minute sermons". Yikes!

We have much to learn from our ancestors in the faith about the value of patience and the need for constant vigilance. When Our Lord does return, may he find all of us beyond reproach for our faithful witness.

Amen!