

**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Year B November 30, 2014**

Theme: Waiting for the Rare Random Descent

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I'm not usually a poetry kind of guy, but this week my Advent imagination has been captivated by "Black Rook in Rainy Weather" by Sylvia Plath.

*On the stiff twig up there
Hunches a wet black rook
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain-
I do not expect a miracle
Or an accident*

To set the sight on fire.....

*....Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky....*

Her attention momentarily caught by a blackbird, a rook, preening its feathers in the rain, Plath reflected on our yearning at least occasionally, she wrote, to find in our lives some sign, some flash, some "*backtalk from the mute sky.*"

We all want some little signal allowing a respite from the normal drudgery and routine of life, or maybe better, something that will point us toward the deeper reality of our lives.

Perhaps we see a gloriously spectacular sunrise or sunset and we yearn to somehow experience a flash of the divine in its brilliance.

We watch the snow settle gently on what just a few months ago was our blooming, butterfly-filled garden and we are profoundly amazed with wonderment.

We just happen to notice our spouse walk out to the mailbox with his or her distinctive gait and for some strange, unexplainable reason there are tears in our eyes.

After one of these miracle, one of these “*spasmodic tricks of radiance*”, as Plath termed them, there’s nothing much we can do to force or compel the coming of another, no matter how much we long to experience it.

Here’s the Advent ending of the poem:

*“The wait’s begun again,
The long wait for the angel,
For that rare, random descent.”*

Perhaps this is what Jesus’ too had in mind when he instructed his disciples and us to “**Watch. Stay alert. You know not when the head of the house will return.**”

At issue is not so much the end of the world or even our own personal death; rather, at issue is “*that rare, random descent,*” that moment when grace breaks into our lives and world and we glimpse the divine present and at work.

Jesus seems to be saying that if we are not open to that moment, if we are not actively looking for such moments, waiting for them, we may never see them.

For Sylvia Plath, watching the Black Rook arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain apparently was such a moment.

For me, the divine was revealed to me in Uganda, East Africa, when at the end of the liturgy, the poor parishioners of my friend Fr. Fabian’s parish insisted on coming one by one and greeting me and giving me gifts:

Stalks of sorghum, bags of rice, a few coins, a bowl of corn,
from a village a chicken, two ears of corn.

Or most moving and humbling of all: a handicapped man with no legs pulling his torso around on a hand-made cart with his arms.

He came up to give me a welcome hug and an egg.

God's angel visited me that day in Uganda.

For our church what a flash grace when Jorge Mario Bergoglio stepped on to the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica and said, no, you bless me first and then, I, Francis will bless you.

Who would have thought our struggling, despairing, hurting old church would experience such a fresh miracle of humility.

For our world, the long wait for the angel literally came true when Gabriel out of the blue came to a tiny village in Galilee to a teenager name Mary and said: Guess what, Mary?

Had Mary been consumed with her own agenda, her own plans she may never have heard the voice of the angel with God's plan.

Where and how will the angel speak to us next?

What message will flash an end to the terrors of aging and death, the fears of Ferguson, the endless wars and violence of Iraq and Afghanistan and Syria?

What "*spasmodic tricks of radiance*" will light up our souls ever so briefly to remind us that light not darkness will be the last word?

"Watch. Stay alert."

*"The wait's begun again,
The long wait for the angel,
For that rare, random descent."*