

Homily-First Sunday of Advent

This weekend we begin the Season of Advent and the beginning of the Church year. In the church year we celebrate the saving mysteries of our faith. We celebrate the birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus it is appropriate that we begin this new church year by preparing for the birth of our savior.

Coming at Christmas

Our English word Advent comes from the Latin word *Adventus* which means coming. We first celebrate the coming of Christ at Christmas. This certainly is the coming of our Lord that we feel most immediately. All around us we find Christmas lights on people's homes. There is a sense of excitement in the air. For us the preparation for Christmas is not only about purchasing and giving gifts but the excitement that we experience is about remembering that in the Incarnation of our Savior, salvation began to be worked out in our world and now in our lives in a new and irreversible way.

The Second Coming of Our Lord

This First Week of Advent the church asks us to reflect on a second coming of our Lord. This Sunday we reflect on the Second coming of our Savior. Today's Gospel is taken from the 13th Chapter of Mark which is an apocalyptic Chapter. Apocalyptic literature was written by Jews and Christians who were oppressed and whose lives seemed to lack hope. This type of literature says that God is in control of history and that God is more powerful than evil. Christian apocalyptic says that God's victory has been won by the suffering, death and resurrection of his Son and that the future will bring life and vindication to faithful Christians.

In the 13th chapter of Mark, Jesus describes persecutions and family divisions. He talks about the "great tribulation" and warns against being led astray by false messiahs and false prophets. There will be a glorious manifestation of the Son of Man and the vindication of the elect. Jesus urges total confidence in the plan of God and constant vigilance as the plan unfolds and reaches its climax.

The conviction that the world would be transformed and that they would reign with the risen Jesus in glory gave them a horizon of hope against which they could interpret their present sufferings, and the insistence on constant vigilance helped them to find significance and ethical direction in their actions in the present. Mark's community is a persecuted community. This literature helps them understand their sufferings as part of God's plan.

The Gospel that we hear today is a specific story within the chapter. In the story we hear today the Master of a household goes on a journey. The master of the household leaves his servants in charge of various tasks and one in charge of watching the door. The servants are to watch as they do not know when the Master will return. In the same way Mark wants his community to watchful and vigilant as they await the return of their Lord. This sense of being vigilant is to characterize the lives of Christians as we do not know when our Lord will return. Advent is to be a time of being watchful and vigilant as we do not know when our Lord will return.

We are not to watch with a sense of fear or dread. We are to remember that we long for our Beloved. During the Season of Advent we are to long for the coming of our Savior. This longing is the longing that one has for another who loves them deeply.

I believe this reading should speak to us in as powerful or even a more powerful way than this reading spoke to the early Christians. The early Christians felt that the Lord would come back immediately, probably within their own lifetime. It has been over 2000 years since of the resurrection of our Lord. It is easy for us to fall asleep. It is easy to forget that we are to be watchful and patient. Our Lord will come back. We are to be vigilant at all times. This reading offers us a lesson by which we are to live our lives.

The Daily Coming of Our Lord

The first reading which we hear proclaimed today speaks to us of the third way in which we experience the coming of our Lord during Advent. Advent is not only about looking back to the birth of Jesus which we celebrate at Christmas nor is it only about celebrating the Second Coming of our Lord at the end of time. Advent is also about celebrating Christ as Emmanuel "God with us." Advent is about celebrating the various ways that we experience Christ who comes into our lives each day.

The first reading comes from the third second of the Book of Isaiah. In this section the exiles have returned from exile in Babylon. In this section the people have to deal with the destruction of their country, their holy city Jerusalem and their temple. The people are confronted with having to reconstruct their lives. They focus not only on the rebuilding of the infrastructure of their country but also they look within. The words of the prophet focus on the people's guilt. The people look within and ask God to bring forgiveness for their sins and reconciliation with their God.

The prophet prays "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down." He recognizes the people's need for their God and so he prays that God would come down and be a part of their lives. He then recognizes that God is like a potter that reworks and refashions His people. God's holy people are the work of their God. The prophet prays that God would once again mold and refashion the lives of his people.

Advent allows us to reflect on our need of the Lord Jesus Christ within our lives. Just as the people of Judah needed their God to help form and fashion them so we need our Lord Jesus Christ to strengthen us and bring us forgiveness as we journey toward our salvation.

One of the ways that we encounter the healing grace of our Lord is within the sacrament of Reconciliation. On December 9 at 6:30 pm the parish will celebrate a Parish Reconciliation Service. This is a wonderful way to experience the forgiveness for which the Prophet Isaiah prayed. This is a way to receive forgiveness as we journey through Advent. I invite the entire parish to this encounter with Christ and his forgiveness.

Advent reminds us that we do not wait and watch for our God alone. God is with us as we wait and long for the fullness of God's kingdom.

Our Advent Response

What will our response be this Advent? In order for our hearts to change during this Advent Season we must enter into the Season. What will we do to enter into this holy Season?

First of all we must recognize that this is the busiest time of the year for each of us. It is imperative that we get away from the hustle and bustle and spend some time in prayer. We will not be spiritually prepared for Christmas unless we take time out to pray.

I suggest three ways of entering the Season of Advent. The first of those is to participate in the Advent Reconciliation Service that the parish will offer. This will allow Christ to refashion and rework our lives as we journey through this holy Season. The Reconciliation Service will be held on December 9 at 6:30 pm. I hope you will be able to attend.

A second way to celebrate this Season is through prayer. One form of prayer that Catholics traditionally find helpful during Advent is the use of the Advent wreath. In the Gathering Space of Church there are these Catholic update pamphlets which include the readings for each day of Advent and a brief thought based on each reading. I encourage families to spend some time each day together in prayer and to use the readings of the day in order to enter this Season.

Finally this is a Season in which people do feel generous. I ask that you celebrate Advent through finding ways to be generous to others. The parish has its Angel Tree through which you can help provide a Christmas celebration to families who otherwise would not be able to celebrate Christmas. I invite you and your family to find ways to live out the Season of Advent though reaching out to others.

May this Season be one of waiting and watching for you and for your family. May it also be a fruitful Season of opening our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ. In the midst of our busy world let us draw near to the Lord through prayer and service.