

Homily-The Second Week of Advent 2007

This weekend we begin to celebrate the second week of Advent. Advent is a season of longing for the coming of the Savior. We celebrate the coming of the Savior in three ways. We prepare for the birth of Jesus at Christmas. We long for the second coming of Christ at the end of time. Advent reminds us that one day we will meet our Savior and our life on earth is to be a time of preparation for that encounter. Finally, Advent reminds us that the risen Christ comes into our lives each day. We are to open our lives to Christ each day and allow Him to come into our hearts and lives.

Today's first reading is written by the prophet Isaiah in the middle of the eighth century. The Assyrian army has just attacked Jerusalem, the capital of the Kingdom of Judah. The prophet writes in the midst of that chaos. The King of Judah is Ahaz who was infamous for his lack of confidence in God. Given this lack of leadership in a difficult moment, Isaiah prophesies that a future king from the line of David will be sent by God to lead Israel. King David represented the highpoint in the monarchy in Israel. This new king will be an even better king than David. Isaiah says that this new king, Emmanuel, will be a ruler who will combine wisdom and fear of the Lord and who will be able to teach others the ways of the God. Isaiah hoped for a ruler who would inaugurate an era of peace and mutually understanding among natural enemies and who would lead his own nation and the other nations of the world to God.

Isaiah did not see these hopes fulfilled in the kings who served in his lifetime.

In the sixth century the kingdom of Judah was taken into Babylon as exiles. Babylon was located where the country of Iraq now exists. The exile ended the monarchy. Even after the exiles returned to their homeland a Davidic king never again sat on the throne of Judah.

For over 500 years the Jewish people longed for a king who would meet the characteristics that Isaiah described. The disciples of Jesus and the early church understood that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah concerning *Emmanuel*. As Christians we believe that the prophecies of Isaiah concerning this ideal king are most fully lived out in the life of Jesus. Scripture scholars do not believe that Isaiah knew he was writing about Jesus when he proclaimed and wrote down his prophecy.

In hearing the first reading today we may be lead to believe that Isaiah is simply providing us with the details of the end of the world and it is our role to merely wait for the coming of the Savior who will establish this kingdom of peace and harmony. I believe this reading not only portrays the final goal of history for which we are to wait but instead gives us a goal as we build God's kingdom of peace and justice through God's power. Our lives are to be about making the changes in our world which will transform the world so that the peace and harmony that Isaiah describes will become a reality. This perspective of building this world of peace is best seen in the encyclical *Development of Peoples* by Pope Paul VI in 1967.

The central figure in our Gospel reading and one of the central figures during Advent is John the Baptist. John is given prominence as he is the precursor of the coming of Jesus. John teaches that the Day of the Lord is coming and thus preaches with great urgency. John understands the Day of the Lord as a time of imminent judgment. He proclaims that in order to prepare for the coming judgment one must repent and bear fruit in his/her life.

John tells the Pharisees and Sadducees that they can neither rely on being children of Abraham nor on receiving baptism of John in order to escape the coming wrath. Instead they must experience *metanoia*. *Metanoia* is the Greek word for changing ones heart and mind. In a Christian context the word means to turn away from sin and to turn back to God. John is saying that this conversion must characterize the lives of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He continues by stating that an aspect of turning back to God is bearing fruit which means actively doing good.

John challenged the people of his time that in order to prepare for the coming of Jesus and for the Day of the Lord they must both repent and actively live out their faith. The message is the same for us. Advent is a time in which we are to turn from our sinful ways and turn back to Christ. Advent is also a season in which we reflect on how we bear fruit in our lives. What part does appropriate action play in our lives? How is ministry a part of our faith lives? Given the proximity of Christmas we may treat Advent as a season for children. The call to repentance and action show that Advent is very much an adult season which calls for an adult faith response.

The holiday season is often a time of being concerned about others and acting on that concern. This certainly is good as it allows us to bear fruit as is mentioned in the Gospel. At the same time the holiday season is often the busiest time of the year. We are people that are very busy eleven months out of the year. December becomes a month when we are especially busy with decorating the house, preparing for parties, buying gifts and writing Christmas cards. While these activities are all good, they can distract us from living out this season. How will you live out this season?

As I end the homily, I would like to offer five ways to live out Advent. The first suggestion comes from the Gospel. John the Baptist proclaims the importance of repentance. This Tuesday, December 11, the parish will celebrate an Advent Reconciliation Service at 6:30 PM in the church. This will give us a chance to reflect on those actions and behaviors that God is calling us to turn away from. It will give us a chance to commit to changing the sinful patterns and behaviors as we move ahead in our celebration of Advent. My second suggestion is to pray by use of an Advent wreath. The parish has assisted families by selling Advent wreaths. You may purchase a wreath through the church office. The third suggestion is that you individually or as a family reflect on the read the readings from the Mass of the day. The readings of the Mass are chosen to fit in with the themes of Advent. Therefore one of the best ways of entering into the spirit of the season is to reflect on the Mass readings. Of course it is especially valuable to pray over the readings for Sunday Mass. My fourth suggestion is

that families discuss the Question of the Week. Each bulletin has a question of the week for children and adults. This is a way of entering into the Season of Advent through reflecting on the meaning of the Sunday Mass. Finally, Advent is a time of doing good for others. The Gospel speaks about bearing fruit. Advent is a time of helping others in concrete ways. How do we as individuals and as families help others during this holy season? It is especially appropriate that some of our families not only buy gifts for the poor but also choose to adopt a less fortunate family. Advent is an opportunity to teach children the importance of doing good through involving them in service.

We are already beginning the second week of Advent. Before long we will be celebrating Christmas. A Holy Season is only as valuable as the time and energy we put into the season. I would suggest that if you have not yet begun to find ways to celebrate Advent that you begin now. I hope that you do grow closer to the Lord in this season and that the prayer and actions of this season help you to experience more deeply Christmas joy.