

## **First Sunday of Advent**

*December 3, 2023*

My dear friends in Christ, this weekend we begin the grace filled season of Advent. A season of special preparation for, and an expectation of, the coming of Christ.

Advent encourages us to examine our lives, to reflect on our need for God to enter our lives, and to prepare earnestly for, and eagerly await, the coming of Christ. He will come to us in the celebration of the Incarnation, in His continual coming in our daily lives, and in His final coming as our Lord to judge us all and to renew the Father's creation.

The central theme of today's readings is Jesus' warning to us to be alert, watchful and be prepared because Christ's Second Coming, coinciding with the end of the world, can occur at any time. The Church therefore invites her sons and daughters on this first Sunday of Advent to prepare for Christ's Second Coming:

- 1) by properly celebrating during this Christmas season the fond memory of Christ's first coming 2000 years ago,
- 2) by experiencing Christ's daily advent or coming in every Eucharistic celebration, in the reading of the Holy Bible, and in the worshipping community, and
- 3) by preparing daily for Jesus' Second Coming which, for us, will happen at an unknown moment of our death or an equally unknown moment when the World will come to an end.

**I**n a certain sense, as I mentioned last weekend, we're today hitting the re-set button, having come full circle and are about to embark on the same journey once again, this time with St. Mark as our guide. The fact that we repeat the same liturgical seasons over and over again points to the sobering truth that a life of faith is never a done deal, never "completed". Rather, it's a continual journey, a continual process, a continual re-examination of our relationship with our loving God. We'll never get it exactly right, we will never fully reach our intended destination in this life. Yet, we walk the journey anyway, trusting that all that God asks is our best effort, a sincere attempt to follow where he leads.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah prays for God's active presence so that the Jewish community, returned from Babylonian exile, may remain faithful to their God.

In the second reading, the Apostle Paul prays for the reconversion of Christians in Corinth who have misused their gifts and charisms and remain ill-prepared for Christ's Second Coming.

It's worth noting that on this first Sunday of the Church Year we don't hear Jesus say, "Stand up! Start walking!" Instead we hear him say,

**"Be watchful! Be alert!"**

Sometimes in the spiritual life we convince ourselves that the ultimate goal of a life of faith is "finding God" or "finding meaning" or "finding truth" - as if these things are far away, and we must pursue them relentlessly. What we sometimes forget is that when it comes to spiritual things - the things of God - God always acts first, God always speaks first, and indeed God always

loves first. And so, stepping out in faith doesn't really mean going out on our own way to find God.

Rather, it's much more about allowing our God to find us, come to us, visit us, and to accompany us on the journey. And to do that, we have to find a way to let him in, to let him get to us, to let him commune with us, so that we can accomplish whatever it is that he is asking of us. And that means being ready each moment of each day - ready to recognize grace in all its forms, ready to recognize and open the door of our hearts to our God who comes to us knocking over and over and over again, not once in a while, but often, continually even through people and circumstances we would never expect. And so we wait. And watch.

This "waiting", this "preparedness" we are called to during season of Advent is sort of threefold. In one sense, we look back and remember that day long ago when our God broke into this world in the person of Jesus, the One the world had longed for, the One the world needed more than it knew, the One who would change absolutely everything.

And we give thanks for all of that. And we also look forward - far ahead - as we anticipate and hope for the day when Jesus will return, as God's plan comes to fulfillment. But we also wait and are on watch for our God who wants to come to us in this time and place, our God who wants to be re-born in each of our hearts this Christmas (and every day after that).

And it can't happen if we are asleep. Or if we don't think it can happen. Or if we refuse to open ourselves up to that possibility, or refuse to be open to grace. Or if other things take priority. Or if we are too busy to pay close attention. Or if we simply don't

want it to happen, or we don't really want those sorts of responsibilities.

In other words, God is ready to do some pretty wonderful things through us. But he won't force himself on us. He lets us choose whether or not we want to answer the door when he knocks.

Will we let him pop-in? Will we let him come unannounced, without notice? The choice is ours to make, and it begins now, not tomorrow or the future. Or will we only accept God on our own terms, as we see fit, according to our plans, our desires, our expectations?

Be watchful! Be alert! God might have just pulled into your driveway.