

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A-22)
Isaiah 2:1-5; Ps 122; Romans 13: 11-14; Matthew 24: 37-44

Things are quite different today. We have had another post-COVID Thanksgiving to celebrate faith, family and friends. There are no masks, but continuing mystery as to what is ahead. In our environment the leaves are down and the days are growing ever shorter. Most of us go to work and return to our homes in the dark. The steel gray skies have returned and there is a bite to the temperature and the dampness that seems to strike right to our bones. Our church environment has also changed. The green colored vestments and church decorations of Ordinary Time have departed with the old church year. And our community worship space is a bit darker as we prepare to receive the Son of the Father, the Sun of our faith, who will bring both light and warmth to our life. Only one candle is lit on our Advent wreath. But three more candles will follow. All this is to prepare us for the blinding light of His Incarnation!

It is Advent, a time for quiet reflection, a time to contemplate the parts of our life which are bruised or broken, a time of anticipation in which we remember the four thousand years during which people of faith waited for the Messiah, a time of assessment of our relationship with our Creator and with those people He places along our path, and a time of forgiveness and reconciliation. This short period of time preparing for the holy day of Christ's birth is in sharp contrast to the shopping days before the great commercial holiday of Christmas. The holiday builds up a momentum and pace to our living – opening our wallets, while this holy season calls us to slow down and prepare our hearts to receive Him – our Savior, King and Brother.

Advent is a time for quiet preparation. In the words of Jesus reported by Matthew, ***“So to, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”*** [Matthew 24: 44] Preparing requires slowing down and waiting in anticipation of our fulfillment in the arrivals of Jesus. Yes, His arrivals, for He comes to us at many times. There was his arrival as a human being, like us in history, which we will commemorate on December 25th. And there will be his return at the culmination of earthly history with the end time, for the Last Judgment spoken of in today's gospel reading. Equally significant is His continuing entry into our lives through, prayer, grace and the sacraments. Jesus works through His Spirit with us collectively in our community of faith and individually in our hearts. But, we cannot be passive witnesses to his arrivals, like an audience at a Broadway show.

First, we must be open and attentive to His arrivals. How many ‘burning bushes’ have we hurried past in the world of our daily routine? How many whispers have we not heard in the din of modern living? How many stirrings within us have we ignored and just taken an antacid for? What did Saint Mother Theresa really mean when she said that Americans have everything in abundance = except love? How much Sacred Scripture have we prayed over, as well as listened to and reflected on? How many opportunities for reconciliation with one another and with our God have we let slip through our fingers?

Second, we must accept these arrivals and internalize them. Jesus does not arrive just at convenient times when we expect Him and in ways that we readily accept. Advent provides a fit time to reflect on how He is with us in every present moment/ Then we need to ask ourselves the tough questions. Jesus cannot arrive and thrive in hardened hearts. Anger, past hurts, perceived slights, ill-chosen or mis-spoken words,, the drive to get-even with others – all these must be put aside. We cannot be forgiven, without forgiving. We cannot be loved, without loving. We cannot see the good in others, until we accept the good in ourselves. We can't compartmentalize our spiritual life separate from our worldly life. If our spiritual life does not animate our worldly life, we are at best schizophrenic and at worst hypocrites.

And third, we must live out our lives of faith in witness and service. Jesus does not arrive in our lives without purpose. When He greets us with the words "peace be with you", He intends that we reflect His love and extend both that love and peace to others along our paths. This peace or Shalom is God's plan for how we should all live. This peace would mean an end to this senseless violence, which all too many people must awaken to each and every day. Paul is speaking in this spirit of peace when he wrote to the Romans: *"Let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy."* [Romans 13:13] It is in living such lives of faith, that Isaiah writes: *"They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."* [Isaiah 2:5]

With our eyes on that future of light, love and peace, we must return to the dim days of today, to this Advent of preparation. As we do, perhaps we should pray the words of Alciun of York:

The sun has fallen below the earth
And now the darkness is here.
Let your uncreated light shine
upon our dark and weary souls.

...

You're your glorious light upon our cold breasts,
Kindling holy love within our hearts.

Amen.

LWF/s

1adventa22

November 24, 2022 (5:25am)