

First Sunday of Advent November 29, 2015

Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Today we begin the season of Advent and with this we begin the new liturgical year. On this day the church invites us to be ready and prepared to receive the Lord. Advent means waiting and we wait eagerly for someone we love, we care and we are ready to invest our time on him. In the liturgical calendar, the season of Advent means a joyful waiting, a waiting for someone with love. Here we wait for Jesus and there is the eagerness within us to receive him as we look forward to this great event of God becoming man. During this season we anticipate and await the coming of our Jesus. There are three aspects of Jesus' coming into the world. We look at the past as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus in History that took place 2000 years ago. Secondly, we look to the present as we prepare ourselves to receive him in our daily lives. We accept him in the Word and in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Finally we look into the future and await his coming at the end of times in majesty and glory to judge the world. Therefore the focus of Advent is by no means limited to just Christ's first coming. An equal, if not more important theme found in the Advent Liturgy is the Second Coming of Christ when he comes again to judge and reunite the world. This is a time of great anticipation as we wait for someone special. We wait for Jesus as his coming contains promise, love, preparation, alertness, reflectiveness, prayer, new beginnings and fulfilment. The name Advent comes from the Latin words, *ad venire* meaning to come to and *adventus* meaning an arrival of a person of importance, a king or a prince or a warrior leader, and in this context it refers to Christ's coming into this world.

Today three readings from the Holy Bible prepare us to be spiritually uplifted according to these three goals of the Season of Advent. In the First Reading Jeremiah preaches to a Jerusalem that was shaky and insecure. Such conditions prevailed because the kings Jeremiah confronted refused to heed his call for repentance. They neglected the God of Israel and instead looked for security in the earthly resources available to them, chiefly alliances with other nations. While warning the people of Israel of the destruction in store for them, the prophet looks ahead to a brighter future. The basis for such a promise is God's faithfulness to promises made long before. To Abraham and his offspring, God had promised to bless them that they would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. They shall conquer their enemies and through their God shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing. Further God was now promising that a righteous Branch would spring up from the descendants of King David, the righteous one executing justice and righteousness in the land. The prophet tells the

people that they will have a just king and his policies will bring security to the kingdom and bring them to the right relationship with God. This secure Jerusalem will carry the name, "The Lord is our Justice."

Today's Second Reading from the First Letter to the Thessalonians gives sound advice as to how people should prepare themselves. Paul looks forward to the final coming of Jesus. It will be a grand entrance into the world together with all his holy ones. Paul invites all to welcome Jesus into their lives in the here and now which should take place every day. By it the followers of Jesus must both acknowledge his First Coming in Bethlehem and prepare for the Second Coming at an unknown future date. The important task for them is that they live holy lives. This reading reminds that as the Lord comes into this world the community should abound in love for one another. Their love should not be limited to only their friends, but also should be for their enemies. This is because they too are the children of God formed in his image and likeness. Again the reading asks to be fully prepared with hearts so placed, holy and blameless before our God and Father. To achieve this goal, one must walk with the sanctifying Holy Spirit who disciplines them to increase in their holiness. He invites them to do all that is humanly possible to remain in communion with God and become more like Christ. This is possible only if the person is filled with living faith and Faith is the bond with Jesus and hence is perceived within the spirit of Advent. All are invited to be more like Christ.

The Gospel of today speaks in special terms of the end of the world and what we refer to as the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time. He speaks on the Lord's prophecy and how we must prepare ourselves to meet it. The entire chapter focuses on the events that will accompany the final ends of the world. These signs will be cosmic in nature. "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." This reminds us that our life in this world is a kind of journey or pilgrimage. It is within this context of this final end that the Gospel proclaims the final coming of the son of man. No one denies that this earth is not our final home, yet many live and act as if it were. We have been forewarned and the words of Christ should forewarn us about the things to come. Some happenings which have already taken place and there is nothing we can do to change them now. However, they have their influence in shaping our present situation. Throughout his Gospel Luke has been cautious about the theme of the final coming in order to subdue the potential enthusiasts who saw the signs of the end in every change of the weather. Luke makes it very clear that when it happens the signs will be obvious to all. These signs will be nothing that has been seen before. They will be cosmic in nature and all who witness will also understand

them. There will be no teachers to point out the presence of these cosmic signs or to interpret what they actually might mean.

The Gospel of today tells us that there will be time for mission before the end, but in this interim period will also involve intense persecution and the fall of Jerusalem. Jesus relates these cosmic signs that precede the Son of Man's return, to himself when he comes on the clouds in the splendour. Jesus says that awareness of these signs will allow one to know when these key moments of divine history are near. Thus, they are to keep watch and must be prepared. They are to live soberly and pray for strength to endure, so as to be able to stand before the Son of Man. After the discourse, Luke notes that the people listened to Jesus' daily teaching at the temple. Jesus further explains to the listeners that day of the Lord will come on them suddenly like a trap; for this day will come upon all those who dwell on the face of the earth. But he asks them to keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that they may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place and to stand before the Son of Man. He wants them to be people of knowledge and understanding about the things of the last days. He wants them to know his word and what the Spirit is doing. And he wants them to bring hope, confidence, and the love of Christ to others. These words of Jesus are applicable to us even today.

The Gospel teaches that beyond the end of times stands the Lord who has come among us in the person of Jesus who will come as a judge. Since this will be the time of judgment, the Gospel calls for repentance and service. For Luke the final end represents the ultimate consummation of God's plan and that momentous event will be accompanied by the return of Christ. This is all part of Luke's larger picture of God being the Lord of all history. Hence the day is called as the day of the Lord. Thus is a time of urgency and hence there is little time for complacency. Those whose lives are under the Lordship of Jesus can live with expectantly, awaiting the Lord's coming. Luke argues against the attitude of slowing down because there is plenty of time before the Lord comes. He tells them that they have to be prepared at all times since we don't know when the Lord will be with us again. Then the end times will hold no terror for those who know what God's live is and they know how to live in his love.

Luke places before us the warning of Jesus to be ready and not to be bloated with pleasure of this world. Living during the Roman times meant corruption, immorality, hedonism, gluttony and cruelty. It was the time of degradation of civilization. What Jesus tells us today is that we have to watch and wait for him. He does not ask us to ignore or despise this earth or this life, but he does ask us to

estimate it for what it is for it is the means to prepare ourselves for eternal life. There will be some anxiety surely, and there will be eagerness to wait for someone we love. There will be the expectancy and hope as the saviour will surely come to us. And yet, the Gospel says the reaction of the Christian disciple should not be one of fear. "When these things namely the signs begin to take place, we have to stand erect, hold our heads high, because our liberation is near at hand." It all depends on one's priorities and attachments.

Since the coming of the Son of Man will be a time of judgment, the Gospel calls for repentance and service. Because the final end is generally spoken of in the future tense, there is a real problem of general complacency. The feeling is that there is still plenty of time to prepare and that there is nothing to get excited in the here and now. Luke argues against that attitude. No human being knows when the final end will take place and the Son of Man will appear. Therefore one must be prepared for this possibility at all times. Each day should be lived as if it were the last. The emphasis here is on preparedness and not on undue anxiety. What Jesus tells us is that if we are prepared every day for this event we need not fear the Day of Judgment. If we are loyal and faithful to our Christian vocation, our end on earth will not be an end but the beginning of our new life.

Jesus stated that all the signs mentioned during today's Gospel Reading were to be fulfilled before the passing away of the generation that lived in his days. All the tasks we humans embrace have an ending. Jesus calls us all to be on our guard so our hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, so the day of the Lord will not catch us unexpectedly, unprepared. No one knows when the end will come. We should be prepared at all times. Therefore during the coming days let us embrace a spiritual attitude so the Season of Advent may become something special for us. May Advent be a true moment of preparation for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, at death, or at the last coming of the Lord, which ever may come first. Our prayers are that each and every one of us as we personally strive to achieve this holy objective for the glory of God.

Thus Jesus gives us the warning: Watch at all times and to pray. He does not want us to be caught unawares. On his part Jesus gives us an eminently positive admonition and the guiding step for our salvation. The Christian who listens to the words of Jesus lives in permanent expectation of his coming and will welcome him. He tells us that are the occasion to take things seriously with a positive attitude to life. Secondly, to be on watch is to be aware each day, through prayer and reflection that the 'today' of salvation is here and now. It is to adopt every measure to live always in the grace of friendship with God, so that were the final

call to present itself today. We today can thank God for all that Jesus has brought and continues to bring into our lives, the countless helps he gives us to lead a good life and as the Gospel tells us to escape all tribulations. We do that best by constantly being aware of his presence and action in the people around us. We are helped in our journey of life by so many people, most of whom we do not know, have never seen. Our waiting for Jesus is a moment of joy and expectation and not a tension filled situation. If we can help the little babe of Bethlehem at Christmas with a sincere and open heart, expressing gratitude for all that he has given us and remaining sorry for the hurt we have placed on to others, we can trust and hope that the second and glorious coming of Christ will not be for us a catastrophe but a fulfilment of all hopes. Therefore here in the season of Advent let us live by faith, walk in hope and are renewed in love so that when Jesus comes at the end time to be our judge, we shall not merely know him, but come to him as a friend.

A man named Paul received an automobile from his brother as a Christmas present. When he came out of his office a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car and admiring it. "Is this your car Mister?" he asked. Paul nodded and told him that his brother gave him for Christmas as a present. The boy was astounded. He asked him truly his brother gave it to him and it did not cost him anything? The he said loudly, oh I wish the same could happen to me. Paul knew what he was wishing for. He wished he had a brother like that. But what the boy said again surprised Paul. The boy repeated that he wished to be a brother like that to give freely. Paul looked at him with surprise and impulsively asked him whether he wanted a ride in this new automobile. The boy agreed easily and said he would love a thing like that. Paul smiled and thought that the boy wanted to show the neighbourhood his ability to be in a shining new costly car. Bur he was wrong. The boy asked him to stop where there were 2 steps and quickly ran into the house. He was back in a moment carrying his little crippled brother and told him as they sat on the step. "Look, his brother gave it to him for Christmas and it cost him not a cent. One day I am going to give you something like that." Paul had tears in his eyes. On an impulse he came carried the boy to the front seat and for a ride in the town.

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