

## **First Sunday of Advent November 27, 2016**

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5 Romans 13:11-14 Matthew 24:37-44

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 Jesus prayerfully, with affection and love. There is the eagerness within us to receive him and we look forward to this great event when God becomes man. However, it is a special kind of waiting for a God who has come already, who is coming regularly into our life and who will come again at the end of time. We know that Jesus came into the world already two thousand years ago and we remember this event with devotion. We know that he will come again at the end of time as a judge and unite the whole universe to himself. He comes daily in the sacraments and in the Eucharist in a very special way as our food and drink to strengthen us and fill us with his grace. We also prepare ourselves to celebrate the feast of Jesus Christ born among us as a human person in a stable of Bethlehem to be one with us and remind ourselves of the great work of salvation began for us.

The readings of today help us to prepare ourselves for this season of Advent. The coming of Jesus and its significance is expressed in the great vision from Isaiah which is our First Reading for today where all nations will come to the Mountain of the Lord. The prophet shows the path of peace. The Gospel reminds us of the second coming of our Lord and the authority with which he will come as a king and a judge. It presents us with the challenge of preparing for the coming of Christ now and at the end of history. But Jesus warns us against complacency in being prepared for the coming of the Lord. In the second reading Paul tells the Romans reminds us that salvation is nearer to us now and we are to be prepared to receive him. They have to emerge from darkness and come to the light.

Today's First Reading from the Book of Isaiah is a prophecy of the incarnation of the Lord God who chooses to come and stay with his people. The prophet speaks of the Lord's mountain which should be recognized as the highest mountain in the land. He says that in the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall move towards

it. Mount Zion, the hill upon which Jerusalem is built, is seen as a holy mountain, the center of the earth and the focal point of the whole world. The idea is contained that Israel is a light to the nations and the Israelites are not told to go out and convert the nations but rather to attract them by their worship on Zion. In the world of this vision, all nations will come together to the central city of Jerusalem and thus will acknowledge the ultimate kingship of Yahweh. Isaiah looks ahead to the day when all nations make their way to Jerusalem to learn the ways of the Lord an ideal made possible by Israel's determination to serve God alone. The people will say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths.' Through Jerusalem, true love and everlasting justice and peace of the Kingdom of God will come to the world for God's terms will lead to peace. All the armaments will be reshaped to be used in farming to bring life and nourishment. The Second Reading taken from the Letter of Paul to the Romans reminds us that salvation is nearer to us now. No matter how we look at it, each day is a day closer to the day when we will come face to face with the Lord Jesus. He calls on the Christians to wake up from their slumber because the day salvation is closer than they realize. Paul tells them to stir up and be ready for the coming of the Lord as Christ will come to judge the world and to gather his elect for their final reward. St. Paul reminds them of the fact that the end will be sudden and will be at an unexpected moment. So he advises them to lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light which is Christ himself. He tells them to live honourably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, they are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. When they were baptized, they were quite a distance away from their encounter with God. But now he is close at hand and they can clearly perceive him. In other words they are to walk in Christlikeness in order to inherit the Kingdom of God that awaits those who persevere in their living faith until the end. United to Christ they will be able to live in the daylight of holiness.

Today's Gospel Reading tells us to keep awake because we do not know on what day and at what time the Lord is coming. At the same time the Gospel tells us of the certainty of his coming into the world. The question to which this passage is responding to is: when and at what time this parusia or second coming of the Son of man is to take place. In the early days of the church, Christianity had raised the expectation that the Son of Man would return soon. Matthew in his gospel clearly

reaffirms the fact that the Son of man will return. Secondly, he stresses the uncertainty of the exact time of his coming. This leads to the basic stance a Christian should have in the face of such uncertainty. Every Christian must live in a constant state of watchfulness. Several examples are given which stress the unexpectedness of an on-coming crisis. The first is the situation that surrounded Noah's day before the flood. No one was prepared because no one was aware that a crisis was at hand. He says that in those days leading right up to the Flood, people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands. They suspected absolutely nothing and suddenly they were swept away. Only Noah, his family and the animals they took into the Ark survived. That is how suddenly the Lord will appear and that is why Christians have to be constantly watchful. The passage gives the warning of division, separation and sorrow. Those who are prepared for his coming will be able to enter into his kingdom. Two people might be doing exactly the same thing, but the one who is prepared will be taken up while the other who is not prepared will be left behind.

The gospel warns us that there will be violence, suffering, injustice, persecution, indifference, and he is the messenger of peace who stands with us and tells us to be vigilant and cautious. Nobody will know when the Lord shall return. He will come all on a sudden and most will be taken unawares. If all knew how close the day of the Lord is, surely, they would have all be living holy lives in fear of the punishment that awaits the unfaithful. The lord tells us that we ought to be ready to receive the Lord in our lives and live according to his call. Matthew strongly emphasizes that a Christian must live as if each day were to be the final time when the son of man will appear for the final judgment. The master of a house if he had known at what time the thief was coming; he would have stayed awake and prevented a break-in. We too could assure our preparedness if we knew the exact time of the son of man's coming. The reality is however, that we do not know and we do not have a way of finding out. The only advice Jesus gives us is to live a life in a constant state of watchfulness.

During this season of Advent we prepare ourselves to receive the God man, Jesus. Surprisingly today's Gospel does not speak about this coming of the saviour into the world. Rather it is full of warnings about the end times and about being prepared and remains ready for them. However, we need to remember that the celebration of Christmas is not as it can easily become just a nostalgic recalling of what happened in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago. The whole purpose of

the celebration is to remind us of what this birth is ultimately about. It is not a question of looking back but one of looking forward. It is a question of being ready and prepared and at the same time lives in hope to receive the Lord. In fact, this coming is not just at the moment of Final Judgment. We must note that the Final Judgment is not so much a day when all will be gathered together but rather it is that moment when each one of us is called to come face to face with God. When Jesus speaks of two men in the fields where one is taken and the other left or two women at the same millstone grinding where one is taken and one is left, he tells us to stay awake and watchful because we do not know the day when the Master is coming. That applies just as much to any of the tragedies in the world as we have been experiencing in the recent past. There is absolutely no one to whom this warning does not apply. During this season of Advent we are all called on and exhorted by the church to prepare ourselves and commemorate worthily the first coming of our brother and savior. If we do this every year and permit the spirit of Christmas enter into the innermost being, and then we welcome the babe of Bethlehem into our lives with a clean and sincere and grateful heart. This will help us to remain in close contact with the Lord and our present lives will be sanctified. God indeed cares for our welfare and he wants us to enter deeply into his mystery. In the Gospel Jesus himself reminds us of the judgment and that we should not be found wanting. Those who are loyal to him and ready to serve will always enter into the heavenly realm. Those who are worthy of him will be taken into his kingdom. This is the spirit of advent for us.

Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, of preparation, of longing. There is a yearning for deliverance from the evils of the world, first expressed by Israelite slaves in Egypt as they cried out from their bitter oppression. It is the cry of those who have experienced the tyranny of injustice in a world under the curse of sin, and yet who have hope of deliverance by a God who has heard the cries of oppressed slaves and brought deliverance. It is that hope, however faint at times, and that God, however distant He sometimes seems, brings to the world the anticipation of a King who will rule with truth and justice and righteousness over His people and his creation. Our expectation also anticipates a judgment on sin and a calling of the world to accountability before God. We long for God to come and set the world right. Yet, as the prophets warned, the expectation of a coming judgment at the Day of the Lord may not be the day of light that we might want, because the penetrating light of God's judgment on sin will shine just as brightly on God's people. During this season we

are preparing to welcome the coming of God among us as a human being, when Jesus was born at Bethlehem for our sake. But that welcome is for a past event and is more a remembering than a welcome strictly speaking. It is a remembering that we need in order to remind us of what has happened, of why it had happened and how it affects my life here and now.

At this time the church reminds us of another coming and that is the final coming when Jesus will come as King and Lord to take to himself all those who have been faithful to the call of his Kingdom. This time of Advent is also a reminder of the need for us to prepare for that Second Coming and to be ready to welcome Jesus whenever he comes. In this way God is seen as wielding authority over the nations and sitting in judgment between them. This will be a time of peace when the weapons of war will be melted down and turned into peaceful implements of agriculture and all will live in harmony. Thus the season of Advents tells us to prepare ourselves for his final coming and at the same time to be aware of his coming that takes place every day and at every moment of our lives. We do not prepare for the future coming either by leaving things to the last minute and getting caught out nor by living in fear and anxiety of a judging God. By far the best way is to live our daily lives constantly in the presence of the Lord who touches our lives at every moment. Hence every experience, every person, every action and every word is a sacrament of God's presence. He can be found there and responded to. When we live our lives constantly surrendering to his presence and seeing his hand in everything that happens to us, we will not be caught unawares.

A certain woman given much to piety had a dream. She was told that Jesus himself would come to her and she must prepare herself and wait for him. She got up very early, cleaned the house, kept things ready for the guest including a meal and waited for the Lord. As she was standing there with expectation a beggar woman came asking for food. The woman was annoyed and chased her out saying I am waiting for an important guest and come another day and I will help you. Then her neighbor came to her and asked for some urgent help and she refused saying she was busy as she was waiting for an important guest. Then a school boy came to her asking for some help as he was not able to get the necessary books and she refused. The day went on. Several people turned up at the gate for help or request of some kind or other and Jesus did not come. Sadly she went to sleep that night and she had a dream. In her dream the Lord came

again and she began to complain to him telling how he had let her down. Jesus told her, “My friend, I came to you several times and you refused to recognize me. I was the beggar woman who was hungry, I was the neighbor who needed the help, and I was the school boy who needed support. Whatever you do to the little of my brothers you do it to me.”

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