



Blessed Sacrament Parish
Homily by Father Chris Comerford
December 2, 2018 First Sunday of Advent

Reading I Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm 25:4-14

Reading II First Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

Gospel Luke 21:25-36

Homily

We know that the signs speak so powerfully to us. I enjoyed putting purple on, the sign of change. We know that we have the Advent wreath. For us in the church—it is New Year's Day. We begin the new church year that begins always on this first Sunday of Advent. We switch from cycle B to cycle C, and in cycle C the Gospel readings are primarily from the Gospel of Luke. We heard from Mark in the previous year, and now we are moving to Luke. There is a lot to think about in these times—opening our hearts and how we think in our minds to prepare for Christmas.

Really Advent is much more than preparing for Christmas. If Advent is only about preparing for Christmas, this Gospel makes no sense for today. Did you listen close? It wasn't about Christmas. It wasn't about the coming of Jesus. It was Jesus telling us about the end of the world. Why? Because we know in Latin the word *Adventus* means Advent, in Greek *paraosia*—it means coming of the Lord. But in Advent it means more than one coming. We know that Jesus came as a baby in Bethlehem, but he has also promised us that he is going to come back. He is going to come back in an impressive way to be the judge of the nations.

And the signs of his coming are going to be a little violent: Natural disasters, wars, and challenges Jesus told us about in the Gospel reading. Signs of the sun and the moon and the stars, nations in dismay, roaring seas and waves, the "powers of Heaven will be shaken and then you will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and glory." It is kind of the opposite of the baby being born in the stable in Bethlehem, isn't it?

But what should we do? Should we be afraid? No. "When these signs begin to happen, raise your head, stand erect, because your redemption is at hand." We are believers and we trust in the love that God has for us. And thus we prepare our hearts for him. So Advent is about his coming and it is about preparing the way of the Lord—for us. But often things get in the way. And Jesus understood that. Sometimes it seems like Advent never happens because there is so much in getting ready for Christmas it is like: "Christmas is here already. What happened to Advent?"

You know, Advent kind of flies by. Or, we have all these other things to do and it can be a challenge. Jesus knew that and said, “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy?” Have you ever thought you had a drowsy heart? It means we are sort of caught up in the way of the world, just going through the motions. Or, beat down because of the choices that we made, often caused by our own fault. We get too caught up in the world and all the things around us. He mentions a couple of them, especially ones we need to turn away from: carousing and drunkenness. Hopefully not too many of us indulge in those things very often, but you know, maybe some stages of that. And when you are in carousing and drunkenness you are not thinking about God very much, other than later thinking, “Oh, God. What did I do?” That’s what happens.

But hopefully we can turn to Him and not be caught up in these bad choices that fall into sin. I don’t know if you noticed but he mentioned a third one. “Beware of the anxieties of daily life.” Why did he mention that? Because he knows what happens when we worry all the time. We get caught up and we are fearful, we are worrying and when we do that it is hard to focus on God. And that can be dangerous and even sinful to a point when our life is spent worrying about what could go wrong. I know people who are this way. You tell them the sun is out: “Oh, I might get skin cancer.” It’s rainy. “Oh, I might get wet.” They can find the negative in anything, and worry about everything and say, “This could happen, or that could happen.” Be careful if you do that too much.

We are people of faith. We need to trust in God, and not always be looking for what could possibly go wrong. So that can be a great challenge. So what are we supposed to do: Have vigilance at all times, and pray for strength. Vigilant, that is an interesting word. It means following through. But at the root of it you see the word vigil. And vigil is giving that longer focus to God.

One of the things you may not know is that there are many religious orders of monks who wake up in the middle of the night to pray. At three o’clock in the morning they get up, they have prayers and they sing, and then they go back to bed. They are keeping the vigil. There is something about sacrificing sleep to pray—that can be a powerful thing. So keeping vigil can be a good thing. Now maybe when we get tired at night, spend some time in prayer. Now this can be a challenge. If you are like me, a lot of time the night ends falling asleep in the recliner in front of the television. Quite frequently this happens. But wouldn’t it be better to end the evening in prayer. This is the time to sum up the time with God, thanking Him and asking for blessings for tomorrow. This is good to think about and keeping vigil and keeping faithful to Him in prayer.

And to pray for strength: I think that is a good thing to pray for. A lot of times people come to me in confession and say, “I need more patience.” And what I say to them is, “If you pray for patience, God usually gives it to you by testing it.” That can be a great challenge. I encourage people to pray for strength rather than patience, strength to face all that you need to face—because patience is tough, and we need strength to face all that God gives us.

We will light the Advent wreath right after this homily. We will thank God for the grace of Jesus coming for us, and we need to prepare our hearts once again, prepare for His coming and to prepare to celebrate his birth as well. These days can be wonderful for us: prayer, a spirit of penance and that is why we wear purple, to give more time to God during this time of Advent, and to be more generous to others. There are a lot of good things we can do during Advent. Let's open our hearts for the coming of the Lord. Let's not be caught up in being too busy, and worry, and anxiety. But let's allow this to be a wonderful preparation of being vigilant and opening our hearts preparing the way of the Lord.

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