

First Sunday of Advent C2024

Today we start a new liturgical year; it is the Year C of the Church. We know that the civil New Year begins on January 1st, but for the church it is with the time of Advent: where we prepare our world, our nation, our city, our home, and our hearts to the commemoration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ we celebrate at Christmas.

This is a special period of time, a season of re-connection with those overlooked relationships, a season of renewal of family ties and friendship. Look at all the decorations we see in our streets and in our homes. Look at all the plans we have for this coming Christmas. Something is in the air, worth deserving all our preparation: Jesus Christ is coming.

That coming was announced long time ago by the prophets when all the people were waiting the accomplishment of God's promise. Today, we have the witness of the prophet Jeremiah. Writing around 6th Century before Christ, Jeremiah says this: "'The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot. ..."

What Jeremiah announced was the coming of the Messiah, a descendant from the branch of David and the savior of the world. He would be the hope of the nations, the executer of God's justice and the guarantor of the salvation to the world. Thus, the people of Israel, instructed by history and strengthened by faith, were raised in the expectation of the coming of the Messiah.

That expectation was fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Mary, and true descendant of David. After his coming in the flesh, we are now waiting for his second coming at the end of time.

The Gospel of this day describes how things will be, at that time of the second coming. Signs and manifestations will appear in heaven and on earth. The powers of the heavens will be shaken and the Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory. Although those events will be terrifying, those who believe in Jesus will raise their heads, knowing that their redemption will be at hand.

Meanwhile, as long as we are still on earth, we have to be vigilant in prayer and perseverance until that day comes. That is why our Lord says: "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap..." To these words of our Lord, St Paul adds another layer of exhortation: Increase and abound in love for one another, and for all, so as to strengthen your hearts. Be blameless in holiness before our God and Father until the coming of our Lord Jesus.

This time of ours is a period of waiting and a season of expectation. There are two ways of waiting, one passive and another active. Perhaps an example can help us understand what is at stakes. At the post office, one might be waiting his turn to come so that he posts his letters, or at the bus station, one might be waiting for the bus to come so that he goes on shopping. But, if one has invited a friend for dinner, he is not waiting for him in the same way he does at the post office or at the bus station. He is waiting by being busy, by preparing something to eat for the time his guest is in.

In the premier case, waiting becomes annoying and sometimes a hassle. We see it easily at the airport, in the supermarkets and in the restaurants. Many are those who are impatient and do not like to wait. And yet, the time of Advent we start today means literally a time of waiting for the return of the Lord. In the biblical sense, the attitude of waiting is rooted in the spiritual virtues of patience and perseverance. We have to wait, and wait patiently, for the coming of Christ. We live by the promise of the return of our Lord. But, we do not know when, how, and in what circumstances he will come back. That makes the waiting even more important than ever

Of a woman who is with child it is said that she is "expecting"; the offices of important peoples have "waiting rooms." But if we reflect well on all that, we realize that life itself is a waiting room. A person who no longer expects anything from life is dead. Life is expectation; the contrary is also true: Expectation is life! And this is the expectation time for the return of the Lord.

We have to live consciously in the expectation of our Lord's coming. We have to be intentional in all our actions like a friend waiting an important guest who is about to visit him. We have to remember that our actions today will determine our future life with the Lord. We have a certainty that if we do so, we will share in his joy. That is why our Lord reassures us that when we see the signs of the end, we have to stand erect and raise our heads.

We should not forget, however, that we await one who has already come and who walks by our side every day. For that reason, after the First Sunday of Advent in which the focus is on the final return of our Lord, on the following Sundays we will hear John the Baptist reminding us of the presence of our Lord among us: "In your midst," he says, "there is one whom you do not know!" Our Lord is present among us not only in the Eucharist, in the word, in the poor, in the Church ... but, by grace, he lives in our hearts and our daily experiences of life.

Advent is a time of renewed prayer. It is a time of remembrance of the promises God made with us when we were conceived, when we were baptized, when we first approached the table of the Eucharist, when we were married or when we were consecrated.

Our waiting is not empty concept, a letting the time pass. It is full of appeals and warning, appeal to change and prayer, a warning to be vigilant. As it was for the Thessalonians, Advent provides us with an opportunity to examine our lives and actions. It invites us to repentance and change of behaviors.

We have to check carefully and see where we have failed, what we have to change, and how we have to put it right in order to prepare our hearts for welcoming the Lord. We have to remember that although Advent refers to the first coming as well as to his the final coming; our Lord comes every day in our lives and in our world. Only those who are prepared can recognize him now and, later, share joyfully in his glory.

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



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