

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent – A

This weekend begins a new liturgical year and new liturgical season, the season of Advent. The society we live in also has its seasons. I'm not talking about the seasons of fall, winter, spring, and summer though. Here are the seasons of the society in which we live: Christmas, which maybe has a little to do with the birth of Christ, but is really about Santa, decorations, and especially presents, then comes Valentine's Day, then Easter – which has *nothing* to do with Jesus' Resurrection – then comes summer / the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, followed by the season of Back to School, followed by Halloween, and then right after that, Christmas again. And of course, there is another season that kind of overlaps some of these seasons for almost half of the year, and that is football. Let's be honest, those are the seasons of the society in which we all live, and they have far greater influence over our society than do any of the Christian seasons. You'll notice that a couple of them share the same

name as our Christian seasons – those would be Christmas and Easter – but otherwise they don't have much in common with them.

So in our society, we are already in the Christmas season; we've already been in it for several weeks now, but in the Catholic Church and in our liturgies, we are instead just beginning the season of Advent. The word Advent comes from Latin: *ad venire*; that is, coming towards. During this season, we of course prepare for the coming celebration of Christmas, when we remember how the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was born into the world for our salvation; we remember during these 4 weeks leading up to Christmas how the Jews waited for thousands of years for the coming of the Messiah. And we also remind ourselves during this season of Advent that Jesus is coming towards us once again: we anticipate the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time.

And so our readings this Sunday reflect that anticipation. Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah speaks of a future age in which

“all nations shall stream toward the Lord’s mountain” to worship the one true God, who created us and who redeemed us. On that day there will be no more war or violence, but instead true and everlasting peace.

We’re all well aware that that day has not yet come. And so we look forward to it, and we hope for it. Because Jesus was born into this world some 2,000+ years ago, and because he later died on the Cross and then rose from the dead three days after that, we can look forward to that day when this world will come to an end not with fear and dread, but rather with hopeful expectation.

So, it is necessary that we pay attention and try to listen to the Lord’s call to us, to reject sin and temptation, to try to live out his commands and to do his will in our lives. So we have some work to do in the meantime. Waiting in anticipation for the coming of the Lord does not mean passively sitting and doing nothing. Nor does it mean just carrying on with our lives as we please or as society

dictates. We must actively prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord, and that is what both our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading and our Gospel reading are about today.

St. Paul urges us to “wake from sleep”, to “throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light”, “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to make no provision for the flesh.” Jesus also tells us in our Gospel to be prepared; he says, “Stay awake! You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” The clear message here is to be prepared, to be alert, to be awake. In the world we live in, with all of its busy-ness, the frenetic, frantic pace of the world’s “seasons”, it is so easy to get caught up in all this activity, trying to keep up with it, trying to be a part of it. In itself, some of it is fine, or maybe neutral, but it’s very easy to lose balance and to lose perspective, and then to permit the world’s seasons to take over and dominate us. We can get so caught up in this world that preparing for the coming of Christ can seem distant

and even not very important, or we can even forget about it completely.

That's why St. Paul wrote those words to the Romans that we heard in 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, urging them to stay awake. That is why Jesus spoke those words to his disciples that we heard in our Gospel reading. We all need to be reminded sometimes. And that is why we have this season of Advent, to remind us not just for the coming celebration of the birth of Christ, but also to remind us to prepare ourselves for when Christ will come again: whether that be at the end of time, or more likely, when he comes to us at the end of our own individual earthly lives.

So, how can we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord, whenever it might be? I would suggest perhaps making a few "New Year's" resolutions – after all, we are at the beginning of a new liturgical year. And just like we make resolutions at the beginning of a new calendar year, why not now as well? It's a good way to prepare

ourselves spiritually for Christmas. Here are some ways we can do that: perhaps give up something small that you enjoy, kind of like what we do during Lent. It could food- or drink-related, or better yet, maybe even internet- or screen-related. And when you do it, make of it a little offering to the Lord. Making little sacrifices like this can strengthen our self-discipline in other areas of our lives as well. Perhaps resolve to be a little more patient when driving (or maybe start trying to be patient while driving). It seems like there's always more traffic over these weeks leading up to Christmas, and so some extra patience would be in order. Perhaps think of a few people you haven't been in touch with in a while who might appreciate hearing from you, and then get in touch with them, not to talk their ear off by sharing everything you've been up to, but more to hear what they have to say. How about using the free Magnificat Advent guide, copies of which are by the doors for you to take, for your daily prayer? And, if you haven't been to confession in a while, how about taking advantage of this beautiful sacrament to

repent and receive God's forgiveness? Just a reminder: we have confessions beginning a half-hour before our daily Masses, also beginning at 3:30 on Saturday afternoons until the 4:30 Mass, and then most Wednesdays from 6:00-8:00 pm (although not this Wednesday, but every other Wednesday this Advent). It's a good idea to go to confession at least once a year, unless you have committed a serious sin, in which case you should go as soon as you can. If you don't feel comfortable coming here, that's OK; check out the confession times at the other parishes in the area. The important thing is to receive the Lord's sacramental forgiveness, not which priest you go to.

When we do these things, whether we realize it or not, we are preparing ourselves not just for the coming celebration of Christmas, but more importantly for the Lord when he comes for us. Doing these things, and being intentional about doing them for the Lord, opens our hearts to him and allows him to come and work

in us and transform us. Really, it is the Lord who prepares us for his coming; we just have to invite him in so that he can do the real work. Indeed, Jesus has already come, and so he is already with us, but now we await the fulfillment of his promises to us. So in the meantime, let us stay alert and prepare ourselves for that day when we will see him face to face.

- **November 30, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**