

First Sunday of Advent, Cycle C November 29, 2009

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

Do Not Become Drowsy

Today we enter into Advent and begin preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ on Christmas day. Decorations have been popping up; we are getting our first Christmas cards; and of course the shopping officially began this last Friday, the Friday after Thanksgiving, what has come to be known as Black Friday. I don't really like that name—it doesn't seem appropriate for a day sandwiched between Thanksgiving and the beginning of Advent. It seems that there has become more emphasis on Black Friday promotions than on Thanksgiving itself.

I've never gone shopping on Black Friday, but I sure do enjoy Thanksgiving. This was the first time in many years that we have been home to celebrate it; for many years we have travelled across the country to visit our children. And one nice thing about being home with just your close family is that you can relax. You can come to the dinner table with casual, comfortable, that is loose, clothes to make sure there is room for the feast. After cleaning up from dinner and a few glasses of wine you can sit in a comfortable chair and succumb to your drowsiness. You can doze off during the football game or movie that someone decides to watch. In the safety of your own home you can afford to become drowsy.

But, at the beginning of our Advent season, we are reminded that we have not yet arrived in the safety of our heavenly home. And Jesus tells us in our gospel this morning: ***“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life.”*** Do not become drowsy. We are reminded to be vigilant because we do not know the day that will be our last. We do not know that day when we will be called before God for our particular judgment. Jesus tells us to: ***“pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”***

We may not be in the time of the final tribulation, but we all face tribulations and temptations every day. We need strength to face them and conquer them. We must be dedicated and committed to our prayer life. Pray the rosary. Read the Bible. Do these things together as a family and strengthen your whole family. For those with Internet access, go to the US Bishops' Web site; they have a link to a special Advent and Christmas page with daily prayer suggestions for each day of Advent. It's like one of those old Advent calendars with the little doors you open each day. If you went online and opened the door for today, you would find information on the tradition of Advent wreaths, including a prayer for blessing the one in your home. You would find today's scripture readings. And you would be able to view a short video reflection on how we can enrich our faith by reading from the Old Testament. Tomorrow the calendar suggests that we pray the joyful mysteries of the rosary and offers a short reflection from Pope Benedict.

We need to pray for strength but we must also work and focus so that we do not become attached to the things of this world. We should not become drowsy. There is a danger that we get caught up with both the good thing of this world and the bad things. We can become drunk on earthly pleasures and forget about the true pleasure of heaven yet to come. We can become caught up with the anxieties of daily life and forget about

the spiritual matters that are the only one which are truly important. And to renew our focus requires that we perform some acts of penance to accompany our prayer.

Advent season has seemed to have lost its penitential focus over the course of my lifetime. We don't seem to use it as a time of preparation any longer. Many no longer prepare for the two comings of Christ during Advent; they use it as a time to already celebrate Christmas. I remember when Christmas parties were celebrated very close to Christmas day and most were in the week following Christmas. We would make family visits to relatives in the week after Christmas to see their Christmas trees. We sang Christmas carols after Christmas when most of the lyrics are much more appropriate, but now we often stop singing on Christmas day. We celebrated after Christmas because most Catholics were making some sacrifices or performing some form of fasting during Advent. You don't see much of that anymore. Advent should be a time of prayer and also a time of penance to help us prepare and equip ourselves to travel the straight path that leads to Jesus.

We should not be Scrooges and take all the fun out of the anticipation of Christmas, but we do need to put things in their proper perspective and remember what the season is all about. I would offer four suggestions for this Advent:

1. Be joyful. Being joyful and cheerful as Christians is one of the best ways we witness to others. Whistle, smile, and maybe even sing when you shop. Do not get caught up in the anxieties. Be a happy camper and not a grumpy and rude shopper.
2. Pray. Make an extra commitment to pray. You can pray the rosary or pray with scripture, or maybe just spend ten minutes per day sitting quietly, giving God a chance to speak with you.
3. Penance. Decide on some act of fasting or penance that you will observe during Advent. Maybe it's giving up sweets or TV or alcohol or making a special effort to do extra chores or sacrifice your time to visit someone who is sick or in need.
4. Reflect. Reflect on how much you are attached to the things of this world; on the difference between your needs and your wants. Last week Father got up after Mass and talked about the importance of supporting the annual "Cookie Walk" and about the poor financial position of this parish. When I look at our weekly collection posted into the bulletin, it is usually close to about \$3000. This comes out to only about \$150K per year to run this parish. Father only makes ends meet by making personal sacrifices himself. I know many are suffering and struggling, trying to make ends meet, and are doing all they can to contribute to the parish. To you I say thank you. But I ask you to spend some time this Advent reflecting privately on your own personal situation, your commitment to the financial support of this parish, and whether your attachments to the things of this world are in proper order.

Jesus wants us to be prepared for His coming. He tells us in our gospel that if we are prepared that we will have nothing to worry about. He says: "***Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.***" Do not be drowsy. Do not fall asleep. Make this season of Advent one of preparation and then stand erect and raise your head as a confident witness to Christ.

Deacon Joe Hulway