

Come and Reconcile With God: Tuesday, December 4 !

I encourage everyone to come to our **Advent Penance Service: 7 pm, Tuesday, December 4. Come and reconcile with God** as we enter into the First Week of Advent! We will have 12 priests!

Are you ready to encounter God? Are you ready for the Second Coming of Christ? As Jesus speaks about the end of times (Mark 13:24-32, last Sunday's Gospel), he makes it clear that no one knows when it will happen: "neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father". Through the prophet Daniel (12:1-3), **God** give us all **words of hope** that "on that day, the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever". At the same time, Daniel gives us pause for reflection: "some shall live forever, **others** shall be an **everlasting horror and disgrace**". This could not be clearer. Yes, there is **heaven**, but there is also its opposite: **hell**, this place of everlasting torment where we are separated from God forever.

We may wonder why the Church, at the end of the Liturgical Year (33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time) chooses readings about the end of times. It is to remind us about the Second Coming of Christ when he will return in all His Glory and give the Final Judgment. It is to prepare us for His First Coming on earth, which we celebrate shortly after entering into the New Liturgical Year, following the Solemnity of Christ, the King of the Universe (last Sunday of Ordinary Time) and the Four Sundays of Advent. The Final Judgment reminds us of both our sinfulness and the infinite Mercy of God. Yes, our Heavenly Father is always ready to forgive us. But we will not be forgiven, unless we ask for His forgiveness of our sins, do penance and truly convert, promising Him that with His help we will do everything to sin no more and to avoid the occasion of sin. Like the blind man who wants to see, we are asking God to have mercy on us. This is what we do when we go to confession to a priest. Jesus has given us the amazing Sacrament of Reconciliation: "Whose sins you (his disciples, today's priests) forgive are forgiven". The penance the priest gives is not a punishment, it is to assist us to stay closer to God. While it is helpful to memorize the words of the Act of Contrition, the priest, before giving you the Absolution of your sins, needs to hear three simple statements:

1. I am sorry for my sins.
2. I know that my sins have offended God.
3. I promise God, with His help, to do everything I can to avoid the occasion of sin.

The third statement is about **conversion** and is the one not always fully understood. For example, if someone willingly has not come to any Sunday Mass for a full year and decides to go to confession, he or she has to break this bad habit and from now on, intend to go to Sunday Mass regularly. When you leave the confessional, God wants you to be totally at peace with Him. He wants you to feel that you no longer are carrying the burden of your past sins. He wants you to feel much closer to Him.

A simple message to all of us for Advent is: Prepare your heart to receive the blessings God wants to pour upon you this Christmas! Be prepared to share your joy with those around you, especially those in most need of consolation!

I invite all of us to think about Advent Resolution. Choose one which will help you open your heart to God's graces and that will enable you to find peace and joy so as to share them with others. It may be a very simple one: put a simple Nativity scene in front of your home, or say a brief daily prayer: "Come Lord Jesus. Fill my heart with your love, peace and joy"! Or it could be a resolution to invite someone from your family or friends to join you at our Penance Service on December 4. Or if you have forgotten the Act of Contrition, you may learn it by heart, or write one in your own words, not too different from one of the several versions used by the Church such as: "My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy." Or you could choose to ask forgiveness from someone whom you may have hurt in the past and simply say: "I am sorry"! Or, you could choose to ask to let someone who has hurt you know that you have forgiven him or her. Or, you could spend one hour of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (exposed on the altar or reserved in Tabernacle) praying for the victims of child abuse in our society and within the Church as well as for the purification of the Church.

As we celebrate today the Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe, may the Holy Spirit help us to open the door of our heart to the coming King of Love!

One in Christ,
Fr. Alain