

## December 1, 2019

### First Sunday of Advent

With Thanksgiving just a few days ago, many of us have fresh in our minds it means to prepare our homes and our tables for hosting holiday guests. Depending on who is coming and the size of the group, it can take days, even weeks to get the preparations in order. When I had my family for Thanksgiving, I prepared the turkey and provided the wine. I depended up on the help of the Knights of Columbus to set up their hall on the first floor of the rectory to set up the tables and chairs as well as well as my family to provide for the rest of the meal. They came bearing boxes, pots and Pyrex containers filled with food to share. Preparation for 23 guests took time and involved the work of many hands.

As we begin the celebration of Advent today, we come together and we help in the preparation for our greatest guest of all, Jesus Christ. Together, we enter into the annual Advent spiritual preparation for the great feast of Christmas, the celebration of Jesus Christ who came to us in our human flesh by his humble birth in the manger. Our Advent preparation imitates the people of Israel who prepared centuries for the birth of the messiah as we prepare for Christmas. We celebrate Christ in a big way because his coming at his birth points us to the coming of Christ at the end of time. St. Cyril of Jerusalem points out that the words that we pray at every Mass, *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*, is for both his coming at his birth and his coming at the end of time. No one knows the day nor the hour, only the Father. We do know that Christ will come at a day and an hour that we least expect. Proper preparation is essential to our Christian way life and Advent brings our preparation into sharp focus. The business of everyday life can distract us from proper preparation for receiving our guest, Jesus Christ. God calls us to direct our lives to his Son, and Jesus himself will help us to prepare for his coming into our hearts and into our world in our time.

Our preparation for the coming of Jesus is not something that we can do at the last minute rather the mature disciple knows that preparation is a way of life, something that we do each day. Advent is the time for us to fine-tune that daily preparation. We need to fine-tune it, because it is not easy to live in this world and truly be prepared for the world to come. We live with the constant tension of what means to live joyfully in this world and yet not be people of the world.

There is no time like Advent where we live with this tension. We live in the world, so most of us buy Christmas gifts, go to Christmas parties, take the kids or grandkids to Snowflake Lane in downtown Bellevue, we do the things that believers and non-believers alike do this time of year, sometimes at almost a frantic pace. At least here, if nowhere else, take a deep breath, we slow down, we quiet down, we keep our hearts and minds focused on Jesus. With each Sunday, we light an Advent candle and then another to remind us to slow down hear God calling to us to prepare, to listen and to wait for the coming of the Lord. The purple liturgical color is penitential. Advent is a time to prepare by turning away from our sins. Too much festivity can make us spiritually drowsy or even for some, emotionally depressed. This is what St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, “. . . It is the hour to awake from sleep . . . let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light . . .”

Here are some questions for reflection during the Advent Season. Am I becoming drowsier or more awake in my relationship with Jesus? When does the activity of the season lead me more into the darkness of exhaustion and even depression? Am I giving enough time for prayer and reflection to be awake in the love of Christ, to live in the light of inner peace, even when life is crazy?

To be awake in Christ Jesus means to live in Freedom. Be free to say no to the unrealistic expectations that we can place on ourselves and we might feel from others. As Mathew Kelly from Dynamic Catholic says, if you tell yourself that you are too busy for prayer and Mass, then you are busier than God intended you to be. Jesus clearly has told us, “. . . you must be prepared for at an hour you do not expect; the Son of Man will come.” In the big picture of things, preparation for Christ's coming is what really matters.