

Imagine for a moment that Jesus was standing in your midst gazing into your eyes, and calling your name. What would you want to say? What words would you want to hear from Jesus? What areas in your life are in need of the healing touch of our Savior?

My friends, the day when we meet Jesus face to face is going to come for all of us, whether we are ready or not. Some of us may live to be 106 years old and some may die at an early age. Our gospel reading today calls us to be ready, to stay vigilant, to maintain hope, even in the midst of chaos or doubt. Jesus reminds us, in a tender and loving way, to not lose sight of what's important in life. In other words, we are called to live every day as if it were our last.

Advent is a season of joyful hope, a time to renew our faith, to take account of where we've been and to decide to where we want to go. Advent is a time for us to reflect and to prepare room in our busy lives for Jesus. It's not a time for us to dwell on all the mistakes we've made or decisions we regret, but rather, it is a time for us to plan the path forward. It's a time for us to let go of all that holds us back and walk with our heads held high.

Advent is only four short weeks crammed into what seems to be the busiest time of the year. And, it's in this busy time that we are asked to slow down and to take the time to tune-up our spirituality so that we are prepared to celebrate the coming of Christ into our lives. This is the time for us to let Christ be the light that guides our path forward.

In today's gospel Jesus promises freedom and redemption. We are told that when life becomes chaotic to "...stand erect, and raise our heads, because redemption is at hand." Jesus comes into our lives not to punish, but rather to bring fulfillment and to release us from all that weighs us down. This sense that Jesus comes to set people free is at the very heart of our Christian faith.

In our second reading St Paul prays that we may have hearts "confirmed in holiness." When Jesus promises that redemption is near, he is telling us that he will help set us free from all those things that prevent us from being holy, if, and it's a big if, we are willing to trust. The question becomes, what is preventing us from being more holy, more loving, more tolerant or understanding?

Unfortunately, being holy doesn't sound like much fun because it calls to mind images of self-righteous people, people who are disapproving, unhappy, lifeless and joyless. The stereotype of holiness involves rejecting the world,

rejecting fun, rejecting almost everything life has to offer except for prayer and suffering. Who would want that? That's not to what Jesus is calling us.

The basic meaning of holiness is to become more Godlike. Jesus enjoyed life, he lived a life of full of laughter, and music, and dancing, and joy. Jesus invites us to focus on what is important in life – one another and our relationship with God. Life is to be enjoyed, but just not at the expense of others or at the cost of our faith. To be more holy simply means keeping our priorities aligned. If our pleasure comes at the expense of another, it's wrong. If our pleasure becomes our master, then we've gone too far.

Holiness is certainly not about misery and sadness and disapproval. A holy person is one who smiles, who offers a helping hand or a kind word, not one who stands in judgment. In the words of St. Paul, a holy person is one who embodies the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That's the example Jesus left for us. That is to what we are called.

No matter what distractions we encounter in life, we should never lose sight of hope. Christ will be our light that shines in the darkness. Sure, we are also going to have difficult times on our journey, but we are also going to have times where we feel God's presence alive and active in our lives. Through it all, we are told to stay on course; to keep our eyes fixed on our final destination.

What a joyous day it will be when we are made whole in God's love. That sacred intimacy that we long for with our savior will become realty, whether it be at the end of the world, as we heard in our gospel reading, or be it at the end of our personal journey. The question for us to ponder this advent season is how prepared we are right now, not tomorrow, but today, right now, to meet our loving savior.

During this advent season, have a conversation with Jesus. Imagine that he is present with you, that he is sitting with you as sort out the challenges and the choices you face. Imagine that he is present in your life in a real and tangible way, offering freedom and healing – because he is! Tell Jesus all that is in your heart without fear. Bring to him the areas of your life which need healing. Listen as Jesus tells you how beautiful you are, how worthy you are of happiness and peace, and how much you are loved and treasured. Open up your heart in prayer and invite your loving God to be your light as you journey together building the kingdom of God here on earth.