

Once John Wesley was asked what he would do if he knew this was his last day on earth. He replied, "At 4 o'clock I would have some tea. At 6 I would visit Mrs. Brown in the hospital. Then at 7:30 I would conduct a mid-week prayer service. At 10 I would go to bed and would wake up in glory." When Luther was asked what he would do on the day of Jesus' return, he said he would go out and plant a tree. Our Scripture text tells us that Christ expects each of us to be about our work so that when He comes, He will find us in gainful and constructive employment, taking care of the world as His trustees. Some years ago a tourist visited the Castle Villa Asconti on the shores of Lake Como in northern Italy. Only the old gardener opened the gates and the visitor stepped into the garden, which was perfectly kept. The visitor asked when the owner was last there. He was told, "Twelve years ago." Did he ever write? No. Where did he get instructions? From his agent in Milan. Does the master ever come? No. "But you keep the grounds as though your master were coming back tomorrow." The old gardener quickly replied, "Today, sir, today." A Christian watches and works as though Jesus Christ, the Master, would return this very day. He

wants Jesus to find him or her busy about his or her tasks: washing dishes, mending shoes, running a store, teaching school, planting a rose bush. Jesus will be pleased to see His faithful ones working hard to build a better world, a more Christian society.

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the Advent Season which coincides with the beginning of a new liturgical year for the Church.

Advent comes from the Latin word 'adventus' which means coming. The season of Advent then is a celebration of the two comings of Jesus – His first coming at His birth on Christmas day and His second coming at the Parousia when He comes not anymore as a baby at His birth on Christmas day but as the Son of God to judge all humanity and put His seal on the completion of the Kingdom of God and bring this all back to His Father. The Parousia would also bring about Eschatology or the end of the world.

You may have seen the sign "Jesus is coming. Look busy!" As previously mentioned "advent" means "coming" and the season of Advent is a time to prepare for Christ's coming. Jesus tells us emphatically to be

alert and awake for that coming. Too often we get overly involved in preparing to celebrate His coming in the past – His first coming at His birth on Christmas day. Of course we are joyful that the Son of God has come to us as a little baby 2000 years ago, and it is appropriate that we prepare to celebrate such an awesome event. But that's not all there is to Advent and it's not that coming what Jesus is referring to in today's Gospel reading when He tells us to be watchful and to be alert.

Advent is as much about the future as it is about the past. If we do not prepare for his future coming, his coming in the past will be of little value to us. As Jesus had said the time for that future coming is unknown to any of us – “You do not know the hour nor the day.”

There will be a time when He comes to each of us personally at the end of our life – our death which is a certainty. None of us are going to live forever.

However, there will be a time when He comes at the end of the world – the Parousia and Eschatology. If we are prepared for His coming at the end of our lives, we will be prepared for His other coming in glory at the end of time. Since we do not know when either of those

future comings will be, we are inclined to busy ourselves with more pressing things, with more immediate wants and needs – our annual Christmas preparations.

There is a distinction between what is urgent and what is important. They are not always the same thing. For example, making a will is something important, but it may not be urgent, unless we are on our deathbed. What is important will eventually become urgent, but what is urgent is not always important. I stress this because there are so many things we feel are urgent at this time of the year. Buy this gift, send this Christmas card, get ready for this Christmas party. Some of the urgent things we feel at this time might be important, but we have to be careful not to let them override the most important thing of all: preparing for Christ's Second Coming – an event that we often do not feel so urgent about.

There is nothing wrong with all the things we do in preparation for the celebration of Christmas. However, Advent and Christmas are meant to enrich us spiritually. If all it does is wear us out and empty our wallets, we've

missed the point. Be awake and alert. We are to prepare our hearts to become more the kind of person we know Christ wants us to be.

We have daily Masses at both parishes. We have a holy hour with Benediction scheduled for the second Friday of December at 6:30 p.m. at St. Mary's Church in Evans Mills. After each morning Mass we say the rosary at St. Mary's and St. Paul's. You can also receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation by going to Confession during this Advent Season . Even if you can get to Church for some of the daily Masses and rosaries and go to confession, perhaps you could take some quiet time each day for prayers and reflections during this Season of Advent. Perhaps this quiet time can be extended to the Christmas Season and for the rest of the year. The Word Among Us booklet which will be given to you as you leave the Church this morning can be a helpful source for your reflections during your daily quiet time. Quiet time helps us keep things in perspective and it is more important now than any other time during the year. You might also consider putting someone on your

Christmas gift list who cannot do anything for you in return.

Advent then is a season of vigilant service preparing us for the coming of Christ as our Savior during Christmas and as our judge and Lord at the end of the world. The reason why the liturgical year ends and begins with the same theme is clear: if we have already embraced Jesus with faith, hope and love in His first coming, we will have no fear of His second coming.

Advent is the season of special preparation for and expectation of the coming of Christ. It encourages us to examine our lives, to reflect on our need for God to enter our lives, and to prepare earnestly for, and eagerly await the coming of Christ.

We can experience Christ's coming in His living presence in the Holy Eucharist, in the Sacred Scripture, in our worshiping community in our parish, in our family, in our own souls and in everyone around us. The early Christians experienced it, and that is why the mutual greeting among Christians then was not "Hi!" or "Good Morning!" but the Aramaic, "Maran Atha" which means

“Come, Lord Jesus.” This greeting acknowledged that Jesus is present in each of them and is about to return.

May God bless you and keep you ever prepared for Christ’s Second Coming.