

Homily: 29 November 2020, First Sunday of Advent

In the Broadway musical, Mame, Auntie Mame and her nephew Patrick are not feeling too happy. It's 1929, right after the big stock market crash, and their money's gone. Mame loses a job just before Christmas, and comes home to find her nephew has pawned some of his things to give her a gift.

Moved by this gesture, Mame then sings about what would help to lift their spirits and the lyrics are words that could be a shot in the arm to all of us right now, for we all need a little Christmas: "Haul out the holly, Put up the tree before my spirit falls. Fill up the stocking, I may be rushing things, but deck the halls again now! For we need a little Christmas, Right this very minute!"

I don't know about you, but I am more than ready for the Christmas spirit. Since I arrived here, I've been ordering things from Amazon and a couple of other places to set up my room and office. Most things have arrived now. But the very special delivery that did lift my spirits more than anything was the little Christmas tree I bought, along with some lights and ornaments to add to the small collection I brought with me. In Rome, we never started decorating until December 8th, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, but I think this year I won't be able to wait that long. I might even start tomorrow! But first I need to immerse myself in the Season of Advent! I need the hopes expressed in the Season of Advent now.

SCREEN: Special Delivery main screen

Today we are beginning our Advent message series aptly titled, **Special Delivery**. And the delivery we will be talking about isn't from Amazon or UPS or the Post Office or Auntie Mame. It's not the special deliveries of Christmas gifts and food, but the special delivery of the birth of Jesus Christ into our hearts once again. St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote about the three comings of Christ: In the past at his birth as a little baby in a stable in Bethlehem, in the future at his Second Coming; and in the present, now, coming into our hearts this Christmas Day. So the delivery for which we are preparing is one greater than anything you or I could ever hope to receive.

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In the Gospel passage, instead of going to the beginning of his life, we go toward the end. Jesus was with his Twelve Apostles in Jerusalem a few days before his death. He was preparing his disciples for what is coming. He was giving them what they needed at the time: a little reality. In a few days, he will be arrested, tried and put to death. And if you go back just a few verses earlier, Jesus describes everything that is coming, not just on Good Friday but at the end of time. He said there would be powerful

signs in the heavens and on earth. Terrifying and unimaginable things: the Temple torn down, Jerusalem destroyed, earthquakes, famine, and wars...trials of every sort. If I myself heard this, I don't think I would have stayed around to see it all. I'd get out while the going was good. It all sounded so terrifying! Why didn't the Apostles run away?

The answer is that despite all the pain and tribulations headed their way, Jesus had promised to remain with them no matter what happened. And here is the advice he gave them about how to get ready:

SCREEN: Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.

If they remained watchful and alert, they would be prepared for anything headed their way. But if they fell asleep - if they got distracted or lost focus, they would be unprepared and the result would be disastrous.

The Season of Advent invites us – in fact, it challenges us – to wake up and be attentive to the process of life. To observe and to listen and to feel the presence of Christ already surrounding us. To be overwhelmed by the awe and the mystery of God constantly being manifested. Without taking the time to pause in this way, we will miss the power of the Christmas experience. We will miss the anticipation of that Special Delivery. We will miss the revelation of God's love for each one of us. It's perfect timing because We need a little Advent, right this very minute. We need the time to pause, to prepare, to hope.

SCREEN: “Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.”

The Scripture Passages today are not only about the Second Coming of Christ and the End of the World – they're about hope – about a time when God will wrought awesome deeds we could not imagine, and about the recognition that God is Our Father: we are the clay, God is the potter. We are the work of God's hands. This is a strong image for me as my grandfather was a potter, and I would watch him for endless hours as he created beautiful vessels on his hand-turned wheel. There is a great level of peace and comfort in the image of God as a Potter.

And indeed, as St. Paul said to the people of Corinth, there is a confidence that Christ will keep us firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord: a day when we will not only experience God's love surrounding us, but when we will recognize the truth: that we are loved and that we a part of God's love itself.

SCREEN: “He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Advent is a time to see clearly who we are, meeting our despair head on and recognizing that there IS hope. It’s a time to throw open our drapes and allow that light to stream into our lives. It’s a time to celebrate the coming of a new way of relating to ourselves and to each other. A time to be watchful and alert, waiting for our God to rend the heavens and come down. To begin to live with our heads held up, and our eyes wide open, looking to recognize God among us. For no ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but ours, doing such deeds for those who wait.

‘Be watchful and alert’ is also Jesus’s message to us. And it’s a message we can’t hear enough, especially this Advent 2020. In the past year, we’ve all experienced incredible disruption and upset to our lives. And just when you start to think you’ve adjusted and got a handle on things, another disruption comes out of nowhere. And with every challenge, the struggle we face is remaining focused on what matters most. Because with so many distractions vying for our attention, draining our time and energy, our focus is constantly shifting.

So we can’t allow the challenges and disappointments of life to overwhelm us or we’ll miss the daily special deliveries of God’s goodness and grace. And they are there every day if we pay attention. What might they look like? It could be a call or text or email from a loved one that we choose not to answer right away. Or How about a call or text from a loved one that we see but choose to ignore. Or someone has asked for our help, and we never get around to responding. Maybe it’s the invitation to get involved in a Church activity, a ministry or small group that in the past we never accepted.

Everyday God comes into our lives in so many ways, but it’s up to us to remain watchful and alert, or else we’ll miss the cues. We all do need a little ADVENT now. So let us open our hearts and embrace it so that we are waiting with great expectations for the special delivery of Jesus Christ. If we prepare our hearts the way we prepare our homes, we can see clearly now what is coming. Be watchful, be alert, and this can be for you, an amazing season of grace.

SCREEN: Giving Tree promo

These four weeks of Advent can be a great gift. Advent reminds us of the Lord’s presence all around us and that we must share our faith with others every day. And here are a few ways how you can do this. If you haven’t already gotten yours, you can pick up

one of the Little Blue Books which has a reflection for each day of the season. They are available in the back of church and in our drive up communion.

This weekend we are beginning our Advent mission project called The Giving Tree, which allows you to share some of your blessings with people in need of their own special delivery. There are some changes this year, but many great opportunities to help those in need, our bulletin has all the details. This coming Friday at 7pm you can join us online for a very special event we are calling 'Rejoice' - a beautiful evening of prayer, Advent music and scripture readings which foretell the birth of Jesus.

SCREEN: Special Delivery main screen

These are just a few ways to make this season special, more great opportunities are coming. Take advantage of just a couple of these and you will transform this season. Amid all the busyness and challenges of life, let us remain watchful and alert for the Special Delivery of Christ this Christmas.