

## 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT—Year B—M11-D29-Y2020

01. As some of you may already know, before entering the seminary, I wanted to be a filmmaker — and for that reason, **I studied at Ryerson University where I did a degree in film studies**—with the hope of eventually moving to Los Angeles and starting a film career — **and maybe becoming the next James Cameron or maybe even a black Steven Spielberg.**
02. Although I have no regrets about the path I eventually chose—movies are still a big part of my life — and something that provides me great **comfort, escapism, and even inspiration.**
03. In fact, **I consider SOME movies very much the parables of today.** And I'm sure if Jesus had come to earth in **OUR TIME—He would have made reference to some of them in His preaching**—or even used some of their stories as parables.
04. There were many times I've found embedded in various films, **even the most unlikely ones**—either **profound Christian messages, beautiful Christian symbols, or memorable and inspirational phrases.**
05. Phrases like: ***"We have to be greater than what we suffer—we have to become hope itself—and even if we fail, what better way is there to live."*** Believe it or not, these profound words come from a superhero movie—**the Amazing Spider-Man 2**—with Emma Stone & Andrew Garfield.
06. Or this phrase, **ALSO** from a superhero movie: **"Hope is like car keys — easy to lose, but if you dig around, it's easy to find."** Those insightful words come from the Justice League movie released a few years ago.
07. Or this phrase: **"Remember Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies."** Those inspiring words come from one of my **all-time favourite movies — a movie I'm sure**

**all of you have heard of, and many of you have seen** — a movie called *The Shawshank Redemption*.

08. For those who haven't seen it—*The Shawshank Redemption* takes place in the late 1940's in the State of Maine. It's the fictional story of a man named Andy Dufresne—a **successful banker, who was convicted of murdering his wife and the man she was having an affair with**—and who was consequently given two consecutive life sentences in the fictional prison called *Shawshank*. Upon entering Shawshank, **Andy finds himself in an impossible, desperate, and bleak situation — one that seemed completely devoid of hope.**
09. Although it's fiction, *The Shawshank Redemption* is a beautiful and powerful story — one that's **embedded itself into our modern collective consciousness — one that could easily be a modern-day parable of its own.**
10. One of the many things I love about this movie is the fact that it **contains such a POWERFUL message about cultivating the virtue of hope.** And, as you may have noticed—all the quotes I've just read have something **to do WITH HOPE.**
11. The reason being that Advent (and Christmas for that matter) is **THE season of hope.** In fact, of **all the words we associate with Advent— words such as beginning, expectation, and waiting—HOPE is the ONE word that gets to the very heart of the season.**
12. And so, Advent is meant to be **a reminder, and a celebration, of the gift and the virtue of hope** — and it's a celebration that is very much needed—especially since hope has become **very much a forgotten virtue in these times**—as the media paints a picture of the world that seems as **desperate, as bleak, and as devoid of hope as the prison in the *Shawshank Redemption*.**
13. But this is precisely **WHY it's necessary to be reminded of the virtue of hope—and why the gift of hope is SO needed in our time.**
14. The quote I read from the *Justice League* movie: ***Hope is like car keys, easy to lose, but if you dig around it's easy to find***—is really

only partially true. It's DEFINITELY EASY to lose hope—especially with all the things happening in our world today—but I'm not sure it's that easy to find hope.

15. For hope, like **ALL the virtues**—is something that we really have to **practice, to work at, and to cultivate**—both within our lives, and within our hearts. But when we do—when we truly make an effort to **BE hopeful—and to cultivate hope within us** — we become much happier people.
16. Because hope can make the difference between living a life of **fear and dread—or living a life of faith and trust**. And hope can make the difference between **living a life of discontent and worry—or living a life of joy and peace**.
17. Of all the quotes about hope I've just shared—my favourite is the one from **The Amazing Spider-Man 2**: ***“We have to be greater than what we suffer—we have to become hope itself—and even if we fail, what better way is there to live.”***
18. In other words, we have to be **greater than the darkness we see around us** — greater than the darkness in the world—and greater than the darkness **that may have touched our lives in a personal way**.
19. And so, we shouldn't let this darkness change who we are—and **who we are meant to be** — and we shouldn't let this darkness deprive us of the gift of hope. This is what it means to be **greater than what we suffer—this is what it means to become hope itself**.
20. In the movie *Shawshank Redemption*, Andy **never allowed his hopeless circumstances to change him for the worse or to make him lose hope** — rather he worked hard **to cultivate hope, and to remain hopeful in a desperate situation** — and as a result, the desperate situation ended up **changing him for the better when it could have EASILY changed him for the worse**.
21. For even though he was in prison for many years, **Andy was ALWAYS free** — in fact, he was **even more free than many of those OUTSIDE**

**prison—because he held onto hope EVEN in the face of a seemingly impossible situation.**

22. And this is the awesome power of hope—hope has the power to free us from that impossible situation which imprisons us — for if we truly have hope—**we can never really be imprisoned or victimized by the darkness around us.**
23. And although hope can mean different things to different people—these are some of the things concerning hope that I think we can all agree on — hope is about being positive, **even when we have every right to be negative** — hope is about believing in the best, **even when all we see is the worst** — hope is about choosing a life of faith and trust, **over a life of fear and worry** — hope is about trusting that everything will work out for the best, **even when all evidence is to the contrary** — hope is about believing that **even our suffering has meaning—meaning that can bring about good for ourselves and for others** — hope is about trusting there is **no sin too great to be forgiven—no sadness too great to be diminished—and no wrong too great to be made right.**
24. For me, hope is primarily about **believing that God has our very best interest at heart — that He has BOTH the power, AND THE DESIRE, to bring about our greatest good** — and that His plans for us are plans for peace, not disaster—reserving a future full of hope for us.
25. There's another quote from the Justice League movie worth mentioning. It was something Batman said to Wonder Woman and it goes like this: ***Superman was a beacon to the world, Diana...you don't just save people—you make them see the best parts of themselves.***
26. I think it's a great quote because it can be applied **so perfectly to Jesus Himself—Who is a beacon of hope to the world — and Who didn't just come to save us—but to show us the very best part of ourselves, and the very best that we could be** — to show us that we can be **hope itself, just as He was hope itself** — to show us that **we**

can be surrounded by darkness, and not become part of it — that we can be touched by darkness personally and not let ourselves be changed by it for the worse.

27. For we have no control over the darkness around us—but **we DO HAVE CONTROL over whether that darkness becomes part of us—and whether that darkness changes us for the worse.**
28. Jesus Himself never allowed the darkness in the world **to become part of Him or to change Him for the worse.** During the darkest moment in His Life—when He hung upon the Cross slowly dying—when the world threw nothing at Him but **hatred, rejection, and abuse** — He never allowed Himself **to become bitter—to return hatred with hatred—to reject those who rejected Him—and to close His Heart to love.**
29. He showed us that **He could be greater than the darkness around Him**—greater than what He suffered — and in so doing, He showed us that **WE could be greater than the darkness around us—greater than what WE suffer.**
30. Often we think that our circumstances need to change in order for us to have any hope — but, in reality, it's **WE that need to change in order to have hope** — for it's **entirely possible (with God's grace) to be hopeful in SEEMINGLY hopeless situations.**
31. In fact, cultivating hope is **OFTEN a catalyst that results in turning our situation around and changing our circumstances for the better** — just as **Andy in the *Shawshank Redemption* was able to change his circumstances for the better**—by not letting his circumstances change him for the worse — and just as **Jesus Himself changed the world for the better—by not letting the darkness of the world change Him.**
32. Maybe some of you here today are dealing with situations that you feel are hopeless. If so, Our Lord invites us today **to pray for the gift of hope** — and to strive to cultivate hope **within our hearts.** Because, hope is a gift **to be sought—and a virtue to be cultivated**

— it is an attitude we adopt and a choice we make — it is choosing to trust that God has a plan for our lives that's **FAR BETTER than any plan we have for ourselves** — it is choosing to believe that God cares about what happens to us **even more than we do** — it is choosing to believe that even when we're suffering—God can turn our situation around and bring good out of our pain and struggle—**if we trust Him—if we allow Him—and if we place the situation in His Hands.**

33. For we all have a choice to make—we can **choose to become part of the darkness around us — or we can choose to be a source of light and hope in a world tainted by darkness** — by not only remaining hopeful—but **by becoming hope itself.** And truly, what better way is there to prepare for the coming of the Lord **Who is the VERY Source and Reason for our hope—and truly, what better way is there to live. AMEN.**