Dear Friends,

Cure for a Broken World

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which is also the first Sunday of the new liturgical year. The Advent season includes the four Sundays that precede Christmas. It is a common phenomenon that because of the many celebrations, dinner preparations and shopping, we tend to be in a continual sense of fatigue. We might forget that Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of the Lord. In this season, we recall two central elements of our faith: the final coming of the Lord in glory and the incarnation of the Lord in the birth of Jesus. The key themes of the Advent season are watchful waiting, preparation, and justice.

In this new liturgical year, the Gospel of Luke will be the primary Gospel proclaimed (Lectionary Cycle C). Today’s Gospel is taken from the last chapter before the passion narrative in which Jesus is teaching in the Temple. We hear Jesus speak to his disciples about the need for vigilance and prayer as they wait for the coming of the Son of Man in glory. This passage marks the conclusion of a lengthy dialogue in which Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, warns about the persecution and tribulations to follow, and identifies the signs that will signal the coming of the Son of Man in glory.

The community for whom Luke wrote his Gospel may have believed that they were already experiencing some of the events Jesus described. Most scholars believe that Luke’s Gospel was written after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. At the time, many Christians interpreted this event as an indication that Jesus’ second coming was near. Though Jesus predicts a time of destruction and fear, Jesus indicates that others will be frightened; Jesus’ disciples are not to fear but are to stand tall. Yet Jesus does not promise deliverance from anxiety or tribulations. He encourages his disciples to pray for strength. The early Christian communities did not find consolation in the promise of a utopia, nor should we. Instead, we find in our Christian faith how we witness to God’s unfailing love for us in all circumstances.

Jesus’ predictions about the end times may sound dire, but in the next paragraph Luke tells us that people woke early to listen to Jesus’ teaching in the Temple area. In his person and in his message, those who heard Jesus found strength and consolation. Like the first Christians, we may encounter events and circumstances that could lead us to despair. Through prayer, however, we find strength and consolation in Jesus’ words and in his continuing presence with us to endure all things and to witness to the action of God in our world. We must become aware that everything is not quite right with our world. Our world is somewhat broken and needs fixing. The world is broken because it does not pay attention to Christ or put Jesus first. The only way to fix our broken world is to mend and repair it with Christ. Christ is the solution to our broken world. There is only one gift at Christmas and that gift is Jesus coming to us. We can make a return gift to Jesus, a return gift of our lives pleasing to him.

Be blessed,

Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.
PREPARING THE MANGER

Where do you fall in the “Christmas-songs-in-November” debate — do you like them, tolerate them, or outright hate them? There’s no theological problem with Christmas songs in November outside of worship, even if it’s not everyone’s cup of tea. But there is a problem with getting so caught up in the bagging of the season — the trimmings, the gifts, the celebrations, all of which are marvelous in their own way — that you forget to prepare the manger.

Every good Catholic knows that Lent is a penitential season. It’s hard to miss that point — Lent doesn’t even have any fun songs you can groove to on the radio. We are pretty good at recognizing that Lent calls us to examine ourselves. To deny ourselves. To give of ourselves. And most of all, Lent calls us to prepare, as a good steward does, for the return of our master.

It’s harder for us to remember that with Advent, but Advent is just as much of an opportunity for penance, preparation, and reconciliation to God — and just as much reason, too. The very name of the season — “advent” — encourages us to focus on what is coming, not what is already here. Be on guard, the readings tell us today, “so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and (the coming of the Lord) catch you unexpectedly, like a trap.”

So let us not forget — our master’s advent is upon us. And let us ask ourselves: how can we prepare the manger?

—Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

SUNDAY’S READINGS

FIRST READING:
I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land. (Jer 33:15)

PSALM:
To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. (Ps 25)

SECOND READING:
Strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. (1 Thes 3:13)

GOSPEL:
Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. (Lk 21:28)

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”
LUKE 21:27

OBSERVANCES FOR THE WEEK OF NOVEMBER 28, 2021
Sunday: 1st Sunday of Advent
Tuesday: St. Andrew, Apostle
Friday: St. Francis Xavier, Priest
Saturday: St. John Damascene, Priest and Doctor of the Church
Next Sunday: 2nd Sunday of Advent

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The first reading - Jer 33:14 - 16 This year, Jeremiah, the prophet of hope, introduces us to our Advent season. He was from a priestly family and was born in a little village called Anathoth, close to Jerusalem. Josiah, who was king (640-609 BC), in Judah in those days, was a God-fearing man. But he was killed in a battle at Megiddo by the invading Egyptians who were attacking the Assyrians (2 Kgs 23:29-30; 2Chr 35:20-24). A later king of Judah, Zedekiah (598-587 BC), swore allegiance in the Name of the Lord God, to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in return for his life and continued to rule in Jerusalem, then rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2Chr 36:13). He faced an attack by the Babylonian (Chaldean) army which surrounded Jerusalem. The king ignored God’s advice, given through Jeremiah, to surrender and save the town and its people, and he concealed the Lord God’s message from his generals (Jer 38:17-27). As a result, the Babylonians took Zedekiah prisoner (blinding him after he had watched the execution of his sons), captured and looted the city, burned the Temple down, and sent the healthy Jews into exile leaving only some poor people. But Jeremiah awakens the hope for a Davidic king, the heir of the covenant promise made to David more than five centuries before, is significant for its constancy in the prophetic tradition. This ideal future king, who stems from the Davidic line, is to be vested with full messianic authority. Unlike so many other descendants of David whose reign had brought little more than disappointment, the future monarch is to be honest and upright for his people (v15).

Messianism centers as much on the nation and the land as it does on the person. Invasion and devastation, so much a part of past history, will be transformed into peace and security in Judah and in Jerusalem, its capital.

The second reading: 1 Thes 3:12 - 4:2 Readings in early Advent always carry forward from the last Sundays of the previous liturgical year the theme of Jesus’ coming again. Today’s reading is a prayer, expressly directed to Christ the Lord, for the Thessalonians to grow in love both for members of the community and those outside, the example of which has been given by the apostolic missionaries themselves (v12; cf. 1, 5f). This growth in love is equated with holiness and is the guarantee of deliverance and salvation at the Lord’s return. The "holy ones" (v13) who are present with Christ at the parousia are those faithful who have died before it occurs (cf. 4:13 - 17).

Paul then enjoins constancy in their Christian comportment (4:1f). He suggests no change of direction, only exhorting them to further growth. Paul has instructed the community with an authority received from Christ himself, which includes directives given by Christ as well as those which Paul interprets as reflecting the thinking of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 7:10, 12). The Christ-centeredness of the parousia calls for the elect to be clothed with the virtues of Christ as they look to his return.

GOSPEL INSIGHTS In today’s gospel reading, Luke passes from his earlier treatment of Jerusalem’s end to a consideration of the end time still to come, with the cosmic imagery proper to that moment (v26). Many of the images used are drawn from the eschatological descriptions of Isaiah 24 - 25, pointing up the universal, all embracing dimensions of the end time. The convulsion of the earthly and heavenly bodies produces terror in its witnesses but it is offset by the glorious return of Christ as the eschatological Son of Man (Dan 7:13). The title is apt since Christ returns as the firstborn of a new humanity. At that moment the only admissible posture for the believer is the upright and erect position of the free person, not the groveling of the slave (v28). There will be no reason for fear since deliverance is at hand.

Jesus’ short exhortation to vigilance (vv34ff) marks the passage’s conclusion. Drunkenness, excessive pleasure-seeking, and absorption in worldly concerns are sure ways to lose sight of one’s final destiny and to be caught unaware as by a concealed trap. Once again vigilance and prayer are seen as the bedrock of the Christian ethic. They offer assurance of salvation. The expectation of the early return of Christ is strongly reflected in the New Testament. The fact is that it did not occur as expected. But it would be unfortunate if we were to lose that sense of tension simply for that reason. Israel hoped for its deliverance with the arrival of the messianic king. That hope remained strong even during the periods of a weakened monarchy. It was never lost. As Christians we believe that Christ is the promised Davidic king, as different as that kingship was. We also believe that Christ is moving toward us from the future, with his advent appearing frequently in signs of the times. If we live with a certain sense of expectancy, accompanied by a consistent response to God’s will, we will be standing tall with heads high at the return of Christ, our brother. He will not disappoint. At his first coming the heavens rejoiced. At his second we shall as well.
1) We need to prepare ourselves for Christ’s Second Coming by allowing Jesus to be reborn daily in our lives. Advent gives us time to make this preparation by repenting of our sins, by renewing our lives through prayer and penance, and by sharing our blessings with others. Advent also provides an opportunity for us to check for what needs to be put right in our lives, to see how we have failed, and to assess the ways in which we can do better. Let us remember the words of Alexander Pope: ‘What does it profit me if Jesus is reborn in thousands of cribs all over the world and not reborn in my heart?’ Jesus must be reborn in our hearts and lives, during this season of Advent and every day of our lives, in our love, kindness, mercy, and forgiveness. Then only will we be able to give people Jesus’ hope by caring for those in need, give them God’s peace by turning the other cheek when we are provoked, give them Jesus’ love by encouraging those who are feeling sad or tired, and giving them God’s joy by encouraging and helping those who feel at the end of their strength, showing them that we care and that God cares as well. When, with His grace, we do these kinds of things we will receive hope, peace, love, and joy in return. Then we will know that when the King returns on the clouds of glory, we will be ready to receive our Lord Jesus fully in eternal bliss.

2) A message of warning and hope: The Church begins the Advent season of Liturgical Cycle C by presenting the second coming of Christ in glory, in order to give us a vision of our future glory in Heaven and to show us the preparation needed for it. She reminds us that we are accountable for our lives before Christ the Judge. Today’s readings invite us to assess our lives during Advent and to make the necessary alterations in the light of the approaching Christmas celebration. Advent gives us time for improving our lives and for deepening the sincerity of our religious commitment. It is a call to “look up” to see that Christ is still here. We must raise our heads in hope and anticipation, knowing that the Lord is coming again. Luke reminds us to trust in Jesus amid the tragedies that sometimes occur in our daily lives.

QUIZ TIME

1. What is the first season of the Church Calendar?  
   A) Lent B) Easter C) Christmas D) Advent

2. How long does Advent last?  
   A) For 40 days B) Until Christmas sales C) Until groundhog appears D) Four weeks

3. “O come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive …………..”?
   A) Pokémon B) Hostage C) Israel D) Soldiers

4. When John baptized people, he was in the river _____. (Matthew 3:6).  
   A) Hudson B) Amazon C) Nile D) Jordan

5. These person/s came to the place where Jesus was born  
   A) Santa Claus B) St. Francis C) The Shepherds D) The Apostles

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