

1st Sunday Advent Year “A”

Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

December 1, 2013

Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matt. 24:37-44

Advent has a twofold character: as a time to prepare for the solemnity of Christmas when the Son of God’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. For these two reasons, the season of Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar, #39

While not the most important liturgical season of the year, it may well be that Advent is my favorite. Only twenty-four days long this year, it is a time of “hopeful expectation.” Hope is the predominant virtue reflected in the readings and the very nature of the season, deemed by the Church to be *a period for devout and joyful expectation.*¹

The Church wisely orders the liturgical seasons to reflect important themes, distinguishing the seasons with a special character, even while we continue to live our daily lives in the midst of the world. For Christians, hope is an indispensable companion of faith.

The Holy Father Pope Francis has just released a document following the 2012 Synod on Evangelization. I shall break it down more closely in future bulletin columns, for it is a long and multi-faceted document. But it is surely the most complete glimpse to date into his mindset as he leads us and challenges us in faith, hope and action. And there is plenty of challenge here. Our first reading taught us that we are to “walk in the light of the Lord,” a beautiful phrase, and yet one difficult to fulfill. Why is it difficult? It is a challenge precisely because the demands of the Gospel are so all encompassing. In the prophetic reading of Isaiah, the challenge was to beat ones swords into plowshares. Try that for starters!

¹ General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar, #39

Faith gives us something, but faith is also intimately connected with the virtue of hope. Isaiah's prophetic vision of a peaceful world in which the swords shall be beaten into plowshares absolutely demanded it. "For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." The source of that hope was to come from Judah and Jerusalem. But we Christians forget that it took seven centuries for this vision to be realized in Christ Jesus.

Pope Francis noted in his new document: "In our world, especially in some countries, different forms of war and conflict are re-emerging, yet we Christians remain steadfast in our intention to respect others, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and to "bear one another's burdens" (*Gal 6:2*).²

The First Sunday of Advent clearly calls us to look beyond Christmas morning to the fulfillment of all time through Christ. So often we think to ourselves, "As soon as my work life gets back on track, then I will be happy." "Once I close on my first house, everything will begin to work out." The fundamental questions remain- "What will make us happy?" "As faithful Christians, how do we spread that happiness to others?" One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was simply this- if you are unhappy, start doing something for someone else and stop thinking about it.

If you and I are not the vessels of hope for the world, then who else will step up? Pope Francis reminds us that "we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink. At times, this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!"³

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 67.

³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 86.

Sometimes this message seeps through, while at others it comes crashing through in an instant. Our second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans this morning was the exact passage to which Saint Augustine turned on that providential day when he heard the voice of the children in the garden saying, "Take up and read." He randomly opened the Bible, and today's passage is the first passage he saw. His own days of sin and promiscuity, while well behind him at age 30, still lingered in his mind and heart.

But this particular passage spoke to him—throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. He, like so many, searched for happiness before it dawned on him through grace that true happiness is not found in a thing, but in a person— the person of Jesus Christ. He never hoarded that happiness, but spent the rest of his life living for others, helping to illuminate their lives by means of the light of his preaching and writing about Christ and His Church.

We await the divine person of the Word made Flesh, even as we keep an eye towards the fulfillment of all time and all hope. As we patiently wait this Advent season, let us be spurred on by hope, immersed in joyful expectation that our salvation is near at hand, trusting that God's promises will be fulfilled as we walk in the light of the Lord.