

1st Sunday Advent Year B

November 28-29, 2020

Readings: Isaiah 63: 16-17, 19b; 64:2-7; 1 Cor. 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

On this Thanksgiving weekend, even if coincidental, it is most fitting to observe a theme of thanksgiving. In our reading from Saint Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, we heard: "I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were in rich in every way," and continuing, "so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift." These are words of encouragement as much as they are words of challenge to stay on the straight and narrow.

We are told that we have been greatly blessed by the grace of God, even as we await the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are reminded of the necessity of remaining irreproachable on the day when he comes. But when will that be? So, we now turn the gospel for help – only to find that we are simply told to "Be watchful! Be alert!" We do not know when the "Lord of the house" is coming. We must be prepared, and yet are given no indication as to when he will arrive.

The season of Advent has four Sundays, yet true to form, nobody wants to wait that long today. Advent is a time of "devout and joyful expectation." The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "When the church celebrates the *liturgy of Advent* each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful we knew their ardent desire for his second coming."¹

For those who wait, how will the season of Advent be advantageous to us? Even the high-tech package tracking sites are occasionally wrong. No, my package did NOT arrive as promised. And yet, it didn't really matter; I submit to you today that it may be helpful precisely because we need more time to prepare for something of a spiritual nature.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 524

I suspect none of you tried to microwave your Thanksgiving turkey a few days ago. Of course not! Some things simply cannot be rushed. I had convinced myself **never, ever** under any circumstance to stoop to the level of purchasing microwave bacon. But I finally broke down recently and did precisely that. There is no mess whatsoever. But I have some news to share with you—we do not have microwave religion! So how on earth could be rushed the birth of the savior of the world?

Our first reading is actually a “prayer for guidance and direction uttered by those who are close to God and who call him Father and Redeemer. Because God’s people are estranged from him and separated from his gaze, the prophet begs for a most dramatic demonstration of God’s power.”² There is a degree of intimacy with God which many find comforting, even a bit unusual for an Old Testament reading. It serves for us as the perfect passage on which to reflect at the beginning of Advent.

“Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay, and you are the potter: we are all the work of your hands.” (Isaiah 64:7) This has to be one of the most endearing images of the Father, reminding us once again that God seeks to mold us in his image and likeness. If we allow him to do so, he will indeed produce a beautiful work of art.

While the Lord desires to do this, Isaiah still wondered out loud why God would allow us to wander so far from his ways? The answer seems to be found by recognizing that to be molded by the Father presupposes a willingness on our part to be changed. If we think that change is no longer possible or desirable, this is the moment we have stopped growing.

Some people think to themselves, “I never grew up learning the prayers of the rosary; isn’t it a bit late now? Or, “Daily Mass has never been a part of my routine. Could I make that switch now?”

² Kevin W. Irwin, *Advent + Christmas: A Guide to the Eucharist and Hours* (Pueblo) 1986, page 5.

Or, “I do not think that I would do well in a Zoom style Catholic men’s group – I think I might be intimidated when asked to express my faith.

Each of these is reasonable and yet each in its own way is an excuse. Indeed, 2020 has been a most challenging year. Many look forward to turning the calendar and putting it in the rear-view mirror. Let us end on the best note of all by being alert and ready to welcome our Lord and Savior. To do that, we have work to do.

May the prayerful season of Advent waiting, draw us closer to our Savior. May the star of Bethlehem beckon us to watch, to wait, too long for the power which comes from being children of the father, molded into the likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.