

1st Sunday Advent Year “C”

December 1-2, 2018

Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.” These words from today’s Gospel followed upon the earlier warning that “people will die of fright in anticipation” of what is coming upon the world. These were his disciples, not simply those who happened to hear him speak one day. They had to be reeling inside!

Today’s Gospel caused me to wonder about what elicits that kind of fear and anxiety in my own life? I compiled a list!

- Aging parents (one increasingly frail) are always on my mind
- Never wanting to turn people away from confession due to time
- Christmas shopping? Thank goodness for online shopping
- The credibility of the Church in the eyes of faithful laity, hoping our leaders will truly address the roots of the problems
- Roof debt service that seems endless
- Icy sidewalks on Selby Ave., providing safety and security

Certain things **do not** cause me anxiety, that cause many others anxiety:

- Paying the bills and school tuitions
- Rush hour traffic
- How the young adult children are doing in their faith
- The bottom line earnings report at work
- The safety of loved ones in the armed forces or first responders

We can all make our own lists, and I suspect that many of the things are centered on the nuts and bolts of our daily lives. Sometimes though, we need to think about the source of our spiritual anxieties, and consider if that anxiety can move us in the right direction. I recall the quotation from the well-known poet, T.S. Eliot (d. 1965):

“Anxiety is the hand maiden of creativity.”

Our own anxieties can cripple us if we are not careful. But they can also motivate us, and in that respect I suspect, T.S. Eliot was most correct. At each Mass the priest prays these words: “**by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress...**”¹The older translation rendered the Latin as anxiety rather than distress. It means a disturbance or commotion. Let us be honest about what disturbs us.

St. Thomas Aquinas called anxiety a form of sadness, calling it the sorrow that weighs us down.² He encouraged people to embrace it, even arousing anxiety in meditation of Christ’s descent into hell. He writes:

Indeed, he who during this life frequently descends into hell by thinking of it, will not easily fall into hell at death; for such meditation keeps one from sin, and draws one out of it.³

The prayer asking for deliverance from anxiety comes immediately after the Our Father and its plea to “deliver us from evil.” No, we are not to have a degree of anxiety that paralyzes us– no good will come from that. This is where proper spiritual balance is so necessary. Are we mature enough to meditate on the sometimes harsh realities of life without letting them paralyze us?

During Advent, we are awaiting the coming of the Lord, not only for Christmas, but especially with respect to his return to earth. That is always the focus of the First Sunday in particular. Our balanced life of prayer, can indeed shield us from an unhealthy anxiety over the state of our souls precisely by moving us to the embrace our Lord holds out for each of us. During this Advent may we be protected from an unhealthy anxiety, one which stifles the graces of the Holy Spirit within us. Embracing the

¹ “Ut, ope misericordiae tuae adiuti, et a peccato simus semper liberi et ab omni **perturbatione** securi...” Perturbatione means a disturbance or commotion. Most liturgies contain a prayer developing the idea of the last clause of the Our Father (But deliver us from evil), and specifying various evils from which we pray to be delivered. This prayer, which always follows the Our Father immediately, is called its Embolism (*embolismos*, insertion).

² Summa Theologica I-IIa Q.35, art. 8

³ Aquinas commentary on the Apostles Creed, art. 5 “We ought to arouse in ourselves a mental anxiety. Since Christ descended into hell for our salvation, we ought in all care go down there in spirit by considering, for instance, its punishments...”

realities we see before us, may we sift through the many messages of the world, to decipher between the true and false.

We run into the arms of Jesus, for he is the source of our consolation and protection. We acknowledge the powerful place the saints can play through their intercession, above all the arms of the Blessed Mother, to whom we all must go in time of trouble and anxiety. May our Blessed Mother lead us to her Son, our Lord and Savior.