

Homily – First Sunday of Advent (C)

Beloved, this First Sunday of Advent brings us into a new liturgical season, Year C. Advent – from the Latin ‘*Adventus* or *Advenire*’ has to do with the coming of Jesus. We see on display today our Advent Wreath with four beautiful candles; three purple and one pink. They represent each of the four weeks of Advent. Each candle is lit weekly to indicate the closeness of his coming. But the pink one is for the third week when we somewhat ‘tone down’ our rigorous preparation filled with joy that the Lord’s coming is near. It is a journey into light – Jesus is the Light from Light. The purple colors symbolize “royalty and majesty of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords”.

Jesus Christ whom we await during Advent is “The one who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty”. This description has three aspects. The first aspect shows he is God that existed with the Father from all eternity. But this is not our focus at this time. In Advent our concern is with the latter two: “The One Who Was” (reliving the historical events of Christ’s first coming into the world) and “The One Who Is To Come” (looking ahead to Christ’s second and final coming). Both dimensions call for a continuous preparation to receive the Lord Jesus who will bring us the fullness of salvation.

Beloved, you may have heard this teaching, from some evangelical groups, that “Once saved always saved.” You may have seen some Christians shouting “I’m saved! I’m saved!! Please, don’t believe any of it; don’t be a part of it. Jesus did not give us that understanding. Rather Jesus insisted, “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13 RSV). Hence in today’s Gospel passage (Lk 21:25-28, 34-36), he says, “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life.... Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.” What about Christ’s statement, “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30).

So, Advent calls for a continuous action. How can one get a prize without completing the race? It is not enough to begin on the path of salvation; one must persevere in faith, hope and charity until the end in order to be saved. Judas Iscariot began well and ended badly; as did “Anani'as with his wife Sapphi'ra” as

well (Acts 5:1). See how St Paul puts it: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete...? So run that you may obtain ... an imperishable [prize].... I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1Cor 9:24-27). Notice that it was only at the end of his life that St Paul declared, “For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day....” (2Tim 4:6-8). Even then, he didn’t say ‘he’s already saved; but expressed the hope. Christians in the pilgrim Church are described as “those who are being saved”, not “those who are already saved” (Acts 2:46-47; 1Cor 1:18; 2Cor 2:15).

Many of the teachings of these ‘evangelicals’ are very misleading. Behold an evident confusion in a PENTECOSTAL TRACT entitled, “7 THINGS THAT WILL NOT GET YOU INTO HEAVEN”: ‘Going to Church; Being Baptized; Keeping the Commandments; Performing Religious Duties; Doing Good Works; Going to Confession; Having Good Morals’. Can you see that everything Christ taught (Matt 5:19; 28:20; Luke 6:46) is turned upside down? What then can get you into heaven, according to their Tract? ‘[Just] become a child of God by receiving (believing in) Jesus Christ; Confess your sins to God; Believe that Jesus died for your sins; Accept Jesus as your Savior from sins.’ Simply put, they are saying to you “Throw away all that Jesus commanded, but believe in him”.

Contrary to such misleading teachings, our gospel passage warns us, “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy ... be vigilant at all times and pray” So we must keep going to Church, saying our prayers, keeping the commandments of God, performing religious duties – responsible stewardship of time, talent and treasure – and going to confession. We want Jesus to be born into clean hearts, into a new heart and a new spirit. St Augustine says, ‘The God who made you without you will not save you without you’. So apart from the regular Christmas time external preparations we make – like decorating our houses, sharing cards with wishes of the season, and planning vacation with friends – we are enjoined to prepare our hearts by repenting of our sins of hatred, unforgiveness, greedy and selfishness, disobedience, immorality, pride and drunkenness, among others, and to go to Confession. “May the Lord make ... [us] increase and abound in love for one another and for all ... [and may he] strengthen ... [our] hearts, to be blameless in holiness...” through Christ our Lord, Amen.