

Homily – First Sunday of Advent A

We are all familiar with the normal practice of having an “Advent/Christmas Wreath”. Normally, it has four candles (three purple and one pink) signifying the four weeks of Advent. Sometimes, a fifth candle (white) is added for Christmas. These candles are lighted gradually (one per week) until all are eventually lit at Christmas. This customary ritual helps us significantly to express what Advent is all about, which is the gradual coming of “the light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of ... [God’s] people, Israel” (Luke 2:32; RSV). Jesus is that Light. We profess Him in the Creed as the “Light from Light...” St. John refers to Him as “The true light that enlightens every man” (John 1:9). This light brings “salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 13:47; cf. Isa 49:6).

Beloved, the message of Advent is simple. It is all about fellowship and communion. God wants to enter into fellowship and communion with us. This underlines the importance of the symbolism of light. St. John explains: “God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1John 1:5-7).

In our First Reading (Is 2:1-5), Isaiah anticipated the first coming of the Lord. He made a passionate appeal to the Israelites to be in communion with God: “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” He stated that through the Lord’s coming, the relationship between God and mankind will be transformed; the world will become a better place. God’s love in Christ will spread like “wild fires” lighting up the world. The distressed and down trodden will have reason to believe again and to hope again. The Church of God will gain prominence: the “mountain of the LORD’s house (the Church) shall be as the highest mountain.... All nations shall stream toward it.” The darkness of sin and ignorance will be dispelled. People will learn God’s ways and follow his path. Wars will no longer be fashionable; and peace will reign. Fellowship and communion will reign.

In our Second Reading (Rom 13:11-14), St. Paul continues the passionate plea, preaching a kind of “Advent Mission”. He considers the second sense of Advent, the Second and Final Coming of the Lord in glory. He warns that it is high time we wake up from the sleep of “attachment to sinful habits” and live in daylight of

holiness. We need to prepare, for the Lord is coming zealously. We must give up the desires of the flesh: orgies, drunkenness, promiscuity, lust, rivalry and jealousy. “For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.... Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

In our Gospel passage (Matt 24:37-44), Jesus declared, “Stay awake! Be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” The popular wisdom is to relax, play down on these admonitions, hoping that “There is time; I’ll change tomorrow.” Christ is stating that that “tomorrow” may not be there: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man.”

Beloved, Advent offers us an opportunity for a fresh start. This new season could be used “to begin” a new relationship with God and neighbor; or “to deepen” the relationship; or “to restore” a broken relationship. During this period, it is usual here in the USA and in many parts of the world to have our homes illuminated by beautiful decorative lightings. Let this practice not be a mere beautification; let it be a “sacramental” indication of an interior transformation of our personal and family lives. We are called to “light up our lives”. Our season is about Jesus Christ. He is Lord not just of the visible and physical; but Lord of the body and soul. So, the regular external preparations – advent wreath, shopping, exchange of cards, and planning vacation with friends – are important. But, even more, we are enjoined not to overlook the spiritual aspect.

Finally, Advent calls for a change in our life patterns. We normally plan our schedule and fit many things into it, the things that are important to us. Are the Lord and our faith at the top of the agenda? Are my prayer and spirituality important on the list? Do I indulge in sinful habits or attachments? Do I abuse alcohol or drugs? Do I sin against chastity? Do I harbor grudge and hateful feelings against my parents, siblings or other persons? What about the sins of greed, selfishness, disobedience, immorality, unforgiveness, pride and drunkenness? May God help us and bless all our preparations through Christ our Lord. Amen!