

Homily – First Sunday of Advent A (Preached Version)

We celebrate the First Sunday of Advent. It is our liturgical “New Year”. I wish you all a Happy Liturgical New Year. Our Liturgical Year begins with the First Sunday of Advent and ends with the Solemnity of Christ the King at the 34th Sunday of the Year. Beloved, we are all familiar with the 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.

The above ritual helps us significantly to express what Advent is all about, which is the gradual coming of Jesus the Light. We profess Him in the Creed as the “Light from Light...” Simeon referred to him as “the light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of ... [God’s] people, Israel” (Luke 2:32; RSV). The first part (the light of revelation to the gentiles) refers to his first coming. He came to reveal God to us. The Second part (the glory of ... [God’s] people, Israel) refers to the second coming in glory and power. He is our crown of glory; he will glorify us as kings and queens. We shall reign with him from everlasting to everlasting.

Beloved, the message of Advent is about fellowship and communion with God and neighbor. In this respect, 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. Hence, we have the symbolism of light present in all the readings for today. We need light to have fellowship. Just imagine a scenario where we suddenly have a total blackout (a full eclipse) and there is no light at all: how can we function together? Thus, 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” (1John 1:5-7).

In our First Reading (Is 2:1-5), Isaiah anticipated the first coming of the Lord. When he was writing Jesus had not come. So it is the original historical context when they awaited the Lord’s coming. Isaiah made a passionate appeal to the Israelites to be in communion with God through living in the light: “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” He disclosed the impact the Lord’s coming will make: 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 [that is, the Church] shall be as the highest mountain.... All nations shall stream toward it.” What he prophesied has been largely fulfilled: the Church began at the upper room in Jerusalem, located at one of the mountains of Mount Moriah. The Church is truly established as the highest mountain and all nations have streamed to it. Presently we have Christians from all over the world – America, Britain, Nigeria, Kenya, Iraq, Germany, China, Italy, etc. Before Christ’s coming into the world, only Israelites had the knowledge of the true God; other nations worship something else, not really God. Now, the relationship between God and mankind has been transformed forever; God’s love in Christ has spread like “wild fires” lighting up the world.

In our Second Reading (Rom 13:11-14), St. Paul presents a kind of “Advent Mission” in the context of 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. He practically identifies some “aspects of darkness” we must give up: the inordinate desires of the flesh, orgies, drunkenness, promiscuity, lust, rivalry and jealousy. He warns that “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed....” This is definitely true. Every Advent season brings us one more year closer to the final day of the Lord’s coming. Remember, Christ comes in this second sense of Advent to crown us kings and queens so that we will reign with him forever. Have you ever seen a king or queen crowned while the person is sleeping? So, “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.” We do not want to suffer the same fate.

Finally, just as our homes are illuminated by beautiful decorative lightings, let us “light up our lives spiritually” and live in expectation of the crown of glory. May God help us and bless all our preparations through Christ our Lord. Amen!