

# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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Today begins the season of Advent, a time of preparation for the *comings* of our Lord Jesus Christ.

While we're of course preparing to celebrate Christmas, Jesus' *first* coming, there are *also* two *others*:

- ❖ his *final* coming "with power and great glory"
- ❖ *and* his *ongoing* one, which includes *all* the ways we encounter him between now and *then*.

At Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the *Word* of God *himself* entered *human history*, and the Advent Mass readings provide the *context* for that.

- ❖ The prophecies of the *OT* share the *promise* of a coming *Messiah*.
- ❖ In the *gospels* we hear John the Baptist telling the people to *repent* because he has *come*.
- ❖ The readings *also* point to Jesus' *final* coming, and in *today's* gospel lesson he reminds us that this call to *repentance* and *preparation* is no *less* urgent *today*.

Jesus tells the disciples that his *final* coming will be like the *flood* in Noah's time, when people had *no* idea what was happening until they were *already* being swept away.

- ❖ And what I think should be *chilling* about this are the *images* Jesus *uses*.
- ❖ *We* think of God visiting *judgment* on the *wicked*, but these are *not* people engaged in the kinds of awful *debauchery* and *sinfulness* we might *imagine*.
- ❖ *These* are people simply going on about their business, totally *unaware* that they were living a life apart from *God*.

As another example, listen to this reflection Pope Benedict the 16<sup>th</sup> gives on the situation that we can easily find ourselves in without realizing it:

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*In my daily living, I have little time for [Jesus] and little time for myself. I am completely involved from morning to evening in all the things I have to do, and I even succeed in eluding my own grasp, because I do not know how to be alone with myself.*

*My job possesses me; the society in which I live possesses me; entertainment of various kinds possesses me; but I do not possess myself.*

*And this means that I gradually go to seed like an overgrown garden, first in my external activities and, then, in my inner life, too. I am propelled along by my activities, for I am merely a cog in their great machinery.*

I don't know about you, but that experience sounds awfully familiar to me.

- ❖ If Jesus' *coming* is ongoing, then we need to live our lives with an *ongoing* sense of *Advent*: preparing to receive him in *stillness* and *watchful* expectation
- ❖ That doesn't happen by accident, but we can cultivate it by making a daily habit of *recollection*, *repentance*, and *rest*.

*Recollection* is simply following *Jesus'* command to *watch* and be *ready*.

- ❖ *Every* evening take some time to be with Jesus – *review* the day with him, look *ahead* to the *next* day, and make a *resolution* for *how* you will make him a *part* of it.
- ❖ Then, *during* each day, create *smaller* spaces where you can *pause* and take stock of how you're *doing*, and then *renew* (and maybe *adapt*) your resolution.

The *other* two things, *repentance* and *rest*, come as *natural* parts of this *recollection*.

The call to *repentance* means to *return* to the *Lord*, and so when our review reveals times when we could've done *better*, we'll ask God's *forgiveness* and for the grace to do *better* in the *future*.

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- ❖ *Far from beating ourselves up*, this is an opportunity to personally experience the *joy* of the prodigal son when his father *runs* to *embrace* him and *celebrate* his *return*.
- ❖ [Encourage us to examine ourselves more fully]

Finally, *resting* is our *response* to seeing *where* we've encountered *Jesus* in the midst of our day.

- ❖ Whether *in* the moment it's *happening* or in thinking *back* on it, we need to *pause* – as much as we *can* – and just *enjoy* that consolation.
- ❖ When we move on from them too *quickly* we don't *get all* that *Jesus* is *offering*, and can lose track of how *frequently* those moments really *come*.

Resting is even *more* important when it comes to the encounters that *aren't* so obvious – things like *illness*, *suffering*, and *disappointment* – things that seemed *annoying* or *unpleasant* in the *moment*.

- ❖ When we need God to *lift* us out of the *crush* of our *obligations* and take us *back* from the things that *possess* us, this is *often* what it *looks* like.
- ❖ *Resting in* the things that have *frustrated* us, made us *wait*, caused us *pain*, left us feeling *alone*, and so on, helps us *remember* that *these* are moments that belong to *God*.
- ❖ In giving them *over* to God, we give him the *space* to reveal the ways he's *preparing* us to feel something of his great *love*.

As Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, it's time to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

- ❖ So let us renew our faith and make ready for our Lord *Jesus'* coming with the same joy and urgency that he has in all his comings to us.