

Reflection: First Sunday of Advent

- Can you feel it? The decorations and lights are appearing on houses. The baking, the gift shopping, the music. That wonderful time leading up to Christmas Day.
- One of my favorite things about this time of year, besides the Christmas cookies, are all those Christmas shows on TV. One of my favorites is the original cartoon version of “How the Grinch stole Christmas” because it has great lessons for all of us no matter how old we are.
- The story takes place in a town called “Whoville” and the people who live there are called “Whos”. The story starts with this first line “Every who down in whoville liked Christmas a lot.... But the Grinch who lived just north of whoville did not”
- So there is problem number one with the Grinch. He lived alone on the top of a hill, all by himself, didn’t like people and didn’t think he needed others.
- It drove the Grinch crazy that the whos would decorate, exchange gifts, join together for a big meal and sing Christmas songs. So he decided he would steal Christmas.
- So on Christmas Eve, while everyone slept, he dressed up as Santa, went into whoville and stole away all the decorations, the gifts and food from every house. He took it all back north on the mountain where he lived; quite satisfied he had stolen Christmas. As the story tells us that next morning the Grinch sang: “ Pooh, pooh to the whos he was grinch-ish-ly humming. They are finding out now that no Christmas is coming. Their mouths will hang open a minute or two then the whos down in whoville will all cry boo-hoo!”
- And he waited to hear the crying but to his surprise the Grinch heard something else. As the story continues:

- “Every who down in whoville, the tall and the small were singing.....without any presents at all.”
- And the Grinch with his Grinch feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling “How could it be so? It came without ribbons, it came without tags, it came without packages, boxes or bags”. And he puzzled 3 hours till his puzzler was sore . Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn’t before. “ Maybe Christmas he thought doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more.”
 - And that is exactly what this weeks scripture reading call us to puzzle on and think about.
 - This Sunday we begin a new church year and a new church season, the season of Advent. A time when our church reminds us to prepare. To prepare our hearts and souls for a very special event.
 - As a church we prepare in several ways: we begin a new cycle of readings switching over from Matthew’s Gospel to Mark’s Gospel, we have a beautiful Advent wreath with candles to be lit each week of Advent. A sign of our hope and waiting.
 - The vestments worn change from Green to Purple – all to signal to us there is something special we need to think about and prepare for: that special event, meeting Jesus our Savior.
 - And Advent calls us to prepare for three different types of meetings with Jesus. I like to think of it as meeting Jesus yesterday, today and always.
 - First we are called to prepare our hearts to celebrate that day, Christmas Day, when Jesus was born into this world, our world, as an infant and our Savior.
 - We prepare by remembering just how amazing, how awesome an event this was. Think about it, God came to live among His people. As a helpless child, in need of men and woman to take care of and watch over, Him.

Let that sink in: God came here to live among His people”.

- To teach, to heal, to save us from sin by showing us how to live a good life.
- Advent tells us to prepare for this day, celebrate it with great joy. Decorate, sing, gather with loved ones - exchange gifts.
- But never, ever forget why we do this: Because God promised a savior and God kept His promise.
- Christmas day was and is special, sacred – and so we prepare to celebrate it.
- But Advent is not just about remembering the past. The season of Advent reminds us we need to prepare for the coming of Jesus in glory at the end of time. We are called to look to the future, the day we will be together with Jesus, face to face, forever in God’s Kingdom.
- It is this very meeting with Jesus, that today’s readings speak to us about.
- And imagining some of these things described in the Gospel reading can at first seem pretty scary. But Jesus isn’t trying to threaten or frighten us, He’s giving us the simple facts: He is coming back to be with us again and if we are prepared, we will be invited to share eternal life in God’s Kingdom.
- A Kingdom described where people from all nations will gather (doesn’t matter where you are from, what language you speak, what color your skin is, how much money you have.). A place with no conflicts, no wars, just peace and God’s love. Who wouldn’t want to live in that kind of Kingdom?
- Our readings today actually present a joyful message. A reminder the Lord loves us and wants us to be with Him. It’s a message meant to encourage and motivate us.

- During Advent we are called to ask ourselves are we prepared for that day, (the Lords return). If Jesus walked into this church right now, face-to-face, what would your reaction be?
- Would you be frightened, worried? Or would there be great joy and the happiness that comes with seeing someone you love deeply – who loves you deeply? Would you rush over to Him and give Him a big hug and tell Him how happy you are to see Him?
- This is the reaction we are called to prepare for in Advent, the great joy, the big hug!!!
- This is the heart of the Advent message. Sure its about remembering and celebrating Jesus' birth in the past. And looking anxiously toward His return in the future. But as St. Paul reminds us in our second reading, it is mostly about now. Meeting Jesus and getting to know Him right now, in this world.
- Advent calls us to be awake to those daily encounters with the Lord. The opportunities HE offers us everyday to get to know Him better, to know what His kingdom is like – opportunities He gives us to prepare for that eventual face-to-face meeting with Him.
- So where do we find these opportunities, where do these encounters with Jesus take place.??
- One important place is in our prayers. Advent reminds us to take time out of our busy lives to pray. Not just out of a sense of obligation, but with a real desire to talk to Jesus, tell Him things, ask for help, give thanks and quietly listen. It's a great joy and comfort to know Jesus waits for us in prayer, meets us there.
- Another place to meet Jesus is in the scripture readings where He speaks to our hearts telling us to take these stories and lessons and words we find in the bible and let them guide our lives today – because they are not dead words on a page- they are His voice speaking and

teaching us. (We have a bible study here in the parish on Saturday mornings 9:30 am to 11am why not make it part of your advent preparation this year).

- We meet Jesus in the sacraments of the church. In the confessional he gives us forgiveness and the strength to change . We meet Him at the altar table, in the Holy Eucharist and He will dwell in us. Intimately teaching us who He is and who we really are – children of God, each one of us precious to Him. .
- And the place we meet Jesus most often is in each other. Advent reminds us to treat each person as if they were Jesus in front of you.
- We can do this in our families with kind words, helping hands and other little things we do to show we love each other.
- We can do this at school by being kind to the person who always gets left out or made fun of.
- We can do this at work; being fair and honest and kind to our co-workers and those we might be responsible for supervising.
- And we meet Jesus especially in the poor, the needy, the sick, the lonely.
- When you visit the sick or homebound Jesus is right in that room with you and the person you visit.
- When we donate food to the food pantry or bring a gift for the giving tree (**please see the information at the end of this reflection on how our parish will conduct the giving tree this year due to the pandemic**) Its Jesus' hand that accepts our offering.
- These are what our daily meetings with Jesus look like.
- Each time we reach out with an act of love- we encounter Christ's love inside of us. And we meet Him in those we help.

- So as we begin the Advent season and our world reminds us of sales and shopping days left - lets try to be a little more like the whos because they understood the true meaning of Christmas. Sure they had presents and decorations and the surroundings of Christmas. But those things didn't own them. And though those things were taken from them, the joy of Christmas could not be taken.
- Let us remember what the whos remembered and the Grinch came to realize: Christmas does not come from a store, Christmas for us means much, much more.

Information on the giving tree

Each year Holy Family provides gifts to many less fortunate seniors, adults, and children through our Giving Tree, and this year we will do the same but in a safe and socially distant manner.

There are 2 ways to give gifts this year

1. **Online Giving (preferred)** – a list of Charities is listed below and on [Holy Family's website](#). Select the Charity you'd like to give to and just click on the donation link. Please write Holy Family Giving Tree in any note or dedication that is available when you complete your online donation.

2. In Person - Purchase \$10 or \$20 gift cards with cash or check at the Holy Family parking lot on Saturday, December 19 from noon until 5pm or Sunday, December 20 from 8am until 1:30pm. You can select the charity that you would like the gift card to go to and volunteers will deliver the cards to the charity. Unwrapped gifts and gift cards purchased elsewhere for children or adults will also be accepted on 12/19 or 12/20. **Please DO NOT drop gifts at Church or the Rectory. Masking and social distance rules will be observed**

Below are the charities that Holy Family is working with. All links for online giving are located on Holy Family's Website through this link: [Holy Family Giving Tree 2020](#)

- **[Abraham House](#)** – a home and community service center that serves as an alternative to prison for first-time offenders and offers afterschool and other programs for their families. Abraham House is located in the Bronx and founded by Catholic Religious. You can donate holiday gifts for the young people and families they serve through this [online giving link](#).
- **[Rosary Hill](#)**- A nursing home run by the Dominican Sisters for those with incurable cancer especially those with financial needs. Rosary Hill does not have online giving, but you can purchase a gift card for the residents on 12/19 or 20 at the HF Lot
- **[Our Lady Queen of Martyrs \(OLQM\)](#)** – A parish in Inwood that will distribute gifts to the boys and girls in their CCD Program. You can select to purchase a toy for a child ages 4 to 13. We are working with a small New Rochelle business, TP Toys on North Avenue for this charity. You can purchase a toy through their [website \(select HF Giving Tree at checkout\)](#) and toys will be collected from the store and delivered to OLQM.
- **[Hour Children](#)** –Residences that provide care, training and support for incarcerated women and their families run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. You can donate holiday gifts for the [children of incarcerated women online](#).
- **[The Guidance Center](#)** serves disabled individuals in New Rochelle and the nearby area. Our gifts go to adults in their PROS program and the Guidance Center has created a [special link so that gifts](#) will go to these needy adults.

- **[Abbott House](#)** –a home located in White Plains for neglected and abused children. Abbott House has [created a wish list for the children](#) and teens they serve on Amazon.
- **[Siena House](#)**- a transitional shelter in the Bronx for women and their infant and toddler children. Siena House is run by the Dominican Sisters of Blauvelt and provides daycare, after-school programming, and support for the Moms. Your [online gift to Siena House](#) will provide gifts and necessities such as diapers and clothing for the children and Moms they serve.
- Church of the Holy Family – The Giving tree donates gifts cards for food and necessities to families that need help in our parish. You can purchase a gift card in the HF lot on 12/19 or 20 or pick up a grocery or drug store gift card yourself and drop it off to the volunteers who will be in the lot that weekend.

Questions? Contact Cathy or Brendan Clarke (914)738-8077