

Reflection: First Sunday of Advent

- I get a little concerned when I read today's Gospel passage because I am a born procrastinator. I usually do everything at the last minute.
- As a child I would put off doing my chores until I got in trouble. As a student I was always cramming for exams at the last minute or pulling an "all-nighter" writing that term paper due the next day. Even now I will wait until my tooth aches before going to the dentist.
- But today's Gospel speaks to us about the importance of being prepared ahead of time – particularly in the things that really matter – those special events in our lives.
- And special events always require preparation, don't they? Just think back to this past Thanksgiving Day. There was cleaning and cooking and travelling all leading up to spending Thanksgiving Day with those we love.
- Couples getting married can spend a whole year preparing for the wedding day. Parents waiting for the birth of their child spend 9 months preparing things for the baby's arrival.
- Special events always require planning if they are to turn out well.

- 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 Mark's Gospel to Luke'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.

- The words “There will be signs” sound pretty ominous but they are not Jesus’ words of warning and threats. Jesus does not ask us to predict the future. The words do remind us that bad stuff happens. And has happened all throughout time: Wars, disasters, viruses, variants. Jesus never says these are the signs that the end of the world has come. Instead, He does say that when we see these signs we are to stand up, raise our heads, and know that help is on the way; our redemption, our healing, our Savior has drawn near.
- 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 as 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.
- But there is also an important caution. We are cautioned not to “be found sleeping” (unprepared). The temptations; the demands and challenges and anxieties of day to day living can draw us away from God – cause us to forget God is close by. Jesus calls us to put our hope in God everyday no matter what difficulties or challenges we might be facing; and to trust God is right there in the midst of it all.
- 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 meet Jesus at the altar table, in the Holy Eucharist and it is there He comes to 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 with kind words, helping hands and other little things we do to show we love each other.
- 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 it is 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 we begin the Advent season not with a message of fear but with a promise of great things to come and a call to prepare for them. And lets remember these daily meetings with Jesus are the best way to prepare ourselves as we wait for that joyous face to face meeting with our Lord.