

First Sunday of Advent

November 27, 2016



*Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ
with righteous deeds at his coming,
so that, gathered in his right hand,
they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who live and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Collect for the First Sunday of the Advent

The First Sunday of Advent is the beginning of another Church Year. Just three weeks ago we turned our clocks back so that it gets darker and darker each day. This darkness reminds us of how we need to search for the light, the light of Christ who brings us into redemption. The shortest day of the year, December 21st, is also the beginning of days becoming longer where we will see the Sun of Justice coming into our world.

In 1948, Dorothy Day wrote a reflection on the meaning of Advent for the Catholic Worker.

"Advent is a time of waiting, of expectation, of silence. Waiting for our Lord to be born. A pregnant woman is so happy, so content. She lives in such a garment of silence, and it is as though she were listening to hear the stir of life within her. One always hears the stirring compared to the rustling of a bird in the hand. But the intentness with which one awaits such stirring is like nothing so much as a blanket of silence.



Be still. Did I hear something?

Be still, and see that I am God.

Zundel, in Our Lady of Wisdom, has come beautiful passages on silence:

'Do we understand at last that action must be born in silence and abide in silence, and issue in silence, and that its power must be an emanation and the radiation of silence, since its sole aim is to make men capable of hearing the Word that silently reverberates in their souls?

All speech and reasoning, all eloquence and science, all methods and all psychologies, all slogans and suggestions are not worth a minute of silence in which the soul, completely open, yields itself to the embrace of the Spirit.

In solitude Christ speaks to the heart, as a modest lover who embraces not His beloved before all the world.'

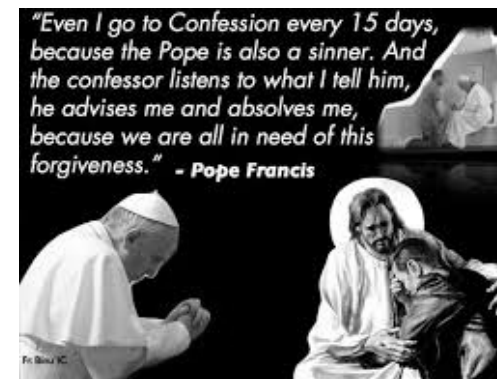
In the letter of Paul to the Romans (Romans 13:11-14) we are reminded that we are to walk in the light of Christ.

*Let us then throw off the works of darkness
and put on the armor of light;
let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day,
not in orgies and drunkenness,
not in promiscuity and lust,
not in rivalry and jealousy.
But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.*

(Romans 13:12-14)

Advent is a special time where we can approach God's infinite mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our prayer of contrition opens our hearts and minds to be committed to a new life, accepting God's love.

*My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.*



Advent is not about our "getting ready" to let God come to us – this season is not about saving ourselves, but recognizing God is already with us and in us. All we have to do is feel God's presence in our hearts. This wonderful season is about recognizing our own weakness yet feeling how deeply God cares for us, even in our deepest failings. We do not love that freely or with such depth, so we may not believe it, yet we have been encouraged to "walk in the light of the Lord!"

The gospel from Matthew (Matthew 24:37-44) traces Salvation History from the prehistory at the time of Noah. We know that this goes on into the 21st-century. What is described in this gospel can be replicated in our present world. The story of Noah pre-figures the great gift of our Sacrament of Baptism. The innocence that is ours through the Sacrament of Baptism is renewed by the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We are being reminded of the awareness that we must possess.

In silence we hear so much that is beautiful. The other day I saw a young mother who said, 'The happiest hour of the day is that early morning hour when I lie and listen to the baby practicing sounds and words. She has such a gentle little voice.'

St. James says, 'If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.' And how much more women need this gift of silence. It is something to be prayed for. Our Lady certainly had it. How little of her there is in the Gospel, and yet all generations have called her blessed.

Behold, how small a fire, how great a forest it kindles. And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity. The tongue is placed among our members, defiling the whole body, and setting on fire the course of our life, being itself set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird and serpent and the rest is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But the tongue no man can tame – it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

'With it we bless God the Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the image and likeness of God.' [James 3:5-9]

To love with understanding and without understanding. To love blindly, and to folly. To see only what is lovable. To think only on these things. To see the best in everyone, their virtues rather than their faults. To see Christ in them.

Many people think an examination of conscience is a morbid affair. Péguy has some verses ... They were about examination of conscience. There is a place for it, he said, at the beginning of the Mass. 'I have sinned in thought, word, and deed through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.' But after you get done with it, don't go on brooding about it; don't keep thinking of it. You wipe your feet at the door of the church as you go in, and you do not keep contemplating your dirty feet.

Here is my examination at the beginning of Advent, at the beginning of a new year.

- † *Lack of charity, criticism of superiors, of neighbors, of friends and enemies.*
- † *Idle talk, impatience, lack of self-control and mortification towards self, and of love towards others.*
- † *Pride and presumption. (It is good to have visitors – one's faults stand out in the company of others.)*
- † *Self-will, desire not to be corrected, to have one's own way.*
- † *The desire in turn to correct others, impatience in thought and speech.*
- † *Meanness about giving time to others and wasting it myself.*
- † *Constant desire for comfort.*

The remedy is recollection and silence."

Advent is not meant to be a time of passivity. It is a time to actively opening our hearts and minds to all that God gives us. Every moment of life is gift, even as simply as the very breath we breathe.



A very simple devotion that is often used is the Advent Wreath. The circle of evergreen recalls the constancy of our God who is always present, with no ending or no beginning. There are four candles, three purple, and one rose. As we journey through Advent each week has another candle lit breaking us out of darkness into light. The first two weeks have purple candles lit, then on the third Sunday we have the rose candle lit marking joy (Gaudette) and finally the last purple candle. When the Advent Wreath is used

at home it is a time of family prayer marking our unity in our journey to celebrate the great gift of Incarnation and to wait for the Final coming of Jesus.

The Liturgy of the Word, during this particular season of the Church Year, has the first reading with the Psalm Response, the second reading, and finally the Gospel, (this year taken for Matthew), follow a particular theme. This particular Sunday gives us two messages: hope and preparation for the coming of our God.

The First Reading (Isaiah 2: 1-5) is not only pertinent centuries ago but is today, where many places in the world are at war. The directives to the ancient people should also be observed by us, today:

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
one nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.*

(Isaiah 2:4)

If we are able to rid this world of weapons of war, then we can be people of hope. Ridding our world of all violence allows us to be real people of peace. This ends competition, placing others and ourselves in opposition, measuring our days as some win and some lose.

In response to our first reading we pray a Psalm, a song of Zion, sung by pilgrims obeying the law to visit Jerusalem three times on the journey of life. The singer anticipates joining the procession into the city. Jerusalem is a place of encounter, where the people praise God and hear the divine justice mediated by the king. The very buildings bespeak God's power. May the grace of this place transform the people's lives!

