

## Welcome! A letter from our Pastor

Dear friends in Christ,

As we begin the four-week season of Advent today we are called to wait joyfully for the Lord. We know Christmas is near. The Thanksgiving holiday is wrapping up this weekend and we are beginning to look toward – though some might say make a mad dash toward – Christmas. Let's resolve to make a liturgical new year resolution (it begins today) to wait patiently for the Lord. While everyone else is speeding up, try slowing down for, as we hear in the second reading at Mass today from Paul's letter to the Romans, "You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand." Yes, indeed. The days are coming!

Our Advent wreath is blessed today and the first candle is lit to remind us of the coming of the light of Christ. Let us not allow the darkness of the world to overshadow that light. It has been entrusted to us to be kept burning brightly. Just as we will light our trees and homes in these coming days, do not fail to show forth the light of Christ in all you say and do as we await "the days that are coming" when the Word made flesh will dwell among us.

One liturgical note for Advent: We will profess the Apostles' Creed during these four weeks of this holy season. The Church gives us the option of saying either the Nicene Creed (which we do most of the Sundays of the year) or the Apostles' Creed. It's probably the one you learned first as a child so it seems appropriate to focus on it during these four weeks of active waiting for the Lord. Your worship aid has the words printed so you might follow along.

I know this is just the First Sunday of Advent, but let's take a look ahead to the schedule of Christmas liturgies later in the month. Our Christmas Mass schedule is as follows: **Wednesday, Dec. 24**, Christmas Eve: 4:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m. in Spanish, and 11:30 p.m., with the traditional Lessons and Carols beginning 30 minutes prior to the 4:30 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. masses. On **Thursday, Dec. 25**, Christmas Day: 8 a.m., 10 a.m., and 1 p.m. (Note that the 1 p.m. Mass will be bilingual in both English and Spanish.) There is no 3 p.m. or 5 p.m. Mass on Christmas Day.

We will have overflow seating available in the Our Lady of Lourdes chapel with an in-house livestream feed and communion brought over for the 4:30 p.m. Mass on Christmas Eve and 10 a.m. on Christmas Day. I suspect we will be able to accommodate everyone in the church at the other Mass times, but we'll be ready just in case we need

to use it. The 4:30 p.m. Mass on Christmas Eve will be the only service that is livestreamed publicly and posted to our YouTube channel if you'd like to view it later. We will remind you of the schedule a few more times between now and Christmas, but I wanted to get it out there early so that you might begin to make plans to join us.

As in the past, we will also extend our times for the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Tuesdays (5:30-7 p.m.) and Saturdays (3-4:45 p.m.) during Advent, or you are welcome to email Fr. Hai, Fr. Aneesh, or myself to schedule a time for confession at the parish that best suits your schedule. That's often a great way to do it so that you don't feel rushed. In the confessionals, we need to keep the line moving fairly quickly in order to accommodate as many as possible, but in the office the schedule is a bit freer for conversation and counseling.

Thank you to all who contributed items for our recent Thanksgiving Food Drive to restock the pantry at Christian Community Service Center (CCSC). Thanks to your generosity it was a record-setting collection for us. Seriously, you all outdid yourselves! Some estimates from those who have been involved with the drive for several years said they believe it was more than double than we've ever collected before. Outstanding! We had to rope in more volunteer drivers to help deliver it all to the food pantry, and that was a great problem to have (and was easily solved).

My sincere thanks the Knights of Columbus and Boy Scouts, who helped with the loading and unloading on the weekends, as well as students from SVdP School, who coordinated all the donations from the school families throughout the week. They, too, had a record-setting collection of items. Of course, we are indebted to Virginia Tubbs, who oversaw the drive for many years for SVdP. Though she told me she was "retiring" from active ministry this year, she was still front and center for much of it, and we are grateful for her passion to help those in need. It's great to know that the spirit and dedication she brought to the Thanksgiving Food Drive lives on in the heart and hands of the next generation of parish volunteers. Thank you one and all.

In other news, for those of you planning ahead, the annual SVdP Gift Giving Weekend will return this year two weeks from now, Dec. 13-14. A beloved Advent tradition in the parish, it's our opportunity to bring a bit of Christmas cheer to families in need around the holidays. We have details in this bulletin of how you can be part of it, but we will be supporting two main platforms this year: Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston with gifts for children of families that they are working with, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul with financial donations that they in turn will use to help clients in our immediate vicinity.

Peace, Fr. Sean