

## **First Sunday of Advent – November 26-27, 2022**

Advent came as early as it could this year. We get four full weeks of Advent before Christmas Day. Even so, it doesn't get here before all the Christmas music, decorations and advertisements – not to mention the biggest shopping day of the year this last Friday.

However, today's Gospel gives us a strong counter to all of this. There will be no parties in preparation for the end of time. Today's first two readings show us a different way to prepare. Paul tells us to "put on the armor of light". The image of armor suggests preparation for some hardships. The image of light however speaks also of hope and victory ahead. As we continue our journey, with the help of God's grace we are to actively be working on the transformation of our lives, throwing aside the works of darkness and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. Our time of waiting and watching for the Lord's coming is to be an active and not a passive time. In a nutshell this is what Advent is all about.

Each Sunday in the introduction to the Mass we hear something similar -- an overview of either the season of the church year we are in **or** an overview of the scripture readings. We usually get something of that also in opening prayer to the Mass called the Collect. It called the "collect" because after giving us a moment to call to mind our personal prayers, the priest, in a way, collects all these prayers and offers a communal prayer to God on behalf of all to begin the Mass.

Sometimes these collect prayers of the Roman Missal which ten years ago were re-written to be closer to the original Latin text are a bit hard to understand, but at the same time can be quite uplifting in their imagery and a helpful guide for our prayer for the day or Sunday.

One priest took a deeper look at today's collect or opening prayer to the Mass and explained how fitting the prayer was for this day even though it expresses its message in a little different way than we might write it out. Like our introduction to the Mass, the opening prayer at each Mass at each Mass summarizes the message God has for us and how he wants us to respond to that message.

This was our opening prayer: *"Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolved to run forth to meet your Christ with*

*righteous deeds at his coming, so that gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.”*

First it reflects quite well the purpose of the Mass. Second it tells us how to approach the season of Advent. And third, it reflects the readings for this First Sunday of Advent.

The reforms of the Mass and other liturgies that came about as a result of the Second Vatican Council were intended to help us participate more fully in the celebration of the sacraments. We were no longer to be mere witnesses to the actions of the Mass or other sacraments; instead, we were to actively participate with the priest who was presiding. So, when Christ comes to us through the proclamation of the Word and the actions of the Sacrament, we do not remain passive. Instead, we actively respond to meet Christ through our participation in the Mass. And as we go forth from the Mass, we also commit ourselves to actively meet and respond to Christ wherever he may appear in our lives. In this way, we as a Church carry out our mission with Christ in the world. So today's opening prayer speaks of us resolving to go forth to meet Christ with righteous deeds.

Next, the collect for today, tells us something about Advent. It is easy enough for us to view Advent as a time to prepare for the celebration of Christmas. It is this, but it is much more than that. Advent is about preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ in every way that Christ may come to us. Christ not only came to us in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago, but he also comes to us today and everyday until his final coming. If Christ is coming to us, we need to make ourselves ready. So as the prayer says, we run forth through our preparations to meet him as he comes to us in so many wonderful ways.

Finally, today's collect prayer reflects well the readings that we just heard. From Isaiah, we hear of nations streaming toward Jerusalem. They have come to realize that God, the true God, has come within their reach, so they set out, and even run, to be in God's presence. In drawing closer to God, they set aside their conflicts and instead turn toward actions that benefit all – they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Paul's message for us this Sunday is that the light of Christ is dawning, and we must not only awaken but also act. As was said

earlier, we must cast off our old way of thinking and acting and put on the new way of Christ.

The gospel also tells us that now is the time to awaken. We need to be aware of what is going on around us and act appropriately according to the signs of the times. That is why the collect prayer tells us to do what is righteous, that is – the right thing, at the right time, and in the right manner.

We can easily get caught up in the events of life. These events can be as ordinary as driving our kids to different activities or as serious as a health crisis. Nevertheless, these matters can cut us off from the presence of God in our lives.

Again, today's readings, urge us to pay attention to the present moment and to be aware of the presence of God in our lives. When we pay attention to our experiences, we can start to see God's hand in everything.

That will change the way we see ourselves and how we relate to the world around us. Our situation may not change, but our ability to move through the situation will change. We will live in a way that is different from the world around us, as Isaiah, Paul and Matthew teach us in today's readings.

As we celebrate the Mass today, let us pray for the grace to turn our thoughts constantly towards God. Whether we are waiting in line somewhere, or experiencing stress over something that is happening, every moment is an opportunity to stay awake and connect with God and change our attitudes and our actions.

Let us take advantage of the grace of this Advent season by shaking our minds and spirits out of sleep. Let us discipline ourselves to turn down the distracting noises around us and focus our spiritual senses on what is real and true and beyond what only our eyes can see.

As St. Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians: "The slight momentary affliction of this life is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."