

1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT

St. Matthew 24:37-44

Today is new year's day. It is the first day of the Church's liturgical year which through the feasts and fasts of the year we participate in the history of salvation and the life of Christ. The year begins today, the first Sunday of the season of Advent. The word "advent" comes from the Latin *adventus* and means "coming." It is the season when we await the coming of the Lord. We commemorate His coming as man two-thousand years ago in a stable in a village of Jerusalem and we await His coming again at the fulfillment of time.

The seasons of the Church are important for they tap into the human need to commemorate what has been. However, the seasons of the Church also look forward to what will be. We live in an in-between time. In Advent we look back to the prophets and the people of the Old Testament who awaited the coming of the Messiah and we look forward as people awaiting the coming again of the Messiah. At Christmas we look back to the coming of God as man in a small child and we look forward to the coming of God as King on the clouds of heaven. In Lent we look back to the passion, death and resurrection of Christ and His ascension into Heaven and we look forward to the resurrection of all men and women, either ascending to Heaven or descending to Hell.

This commemoration and expectancy which is so very important for the Church is lost in our society. The Church in Advent prepares week by week for the coming of the Lord by subduing herself, expressed in the dour violet of the vestments, the same colour used by the Church in Lent and at funerals, as well as by the minimal use of flowers, and by lighting a candle each week that burns slowly as we await the reason for the season, which is the birth of Christ.

Society, on the other hand, makes no preparation for Christmas but throws up decorations now and lives as though it was Christmas already. In fact, the shops do not even wait until Advent because they started decorating back in October. And then, the day after Christmas Day—the actual beginning of Christmas—they tear it all down and start decorating for Easter. To live like that is to live like those in the days of Noah, who ate and drink right up to the day of the flood. We must live, instead, like Noah and his family, who prepared an ark so that at the coming of the flood they would be borne above the waters and brought to a new land.

The fact is that these four weeks which begin today are a season of preparation for the great celebration of the nativity of the Lord and are a preparation for the coming again of Christ at the end of time. It is easy, admittedly, to think of the second coming as a kind of fairytale or a movie theme, but it is true that the Lord will come again and we will see “[T]he sign of the Son of Man... in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (*Mt. 24:30*). We do not know the day or the hour, but we know it to be true, for the Lord has said so. Whether that day comes whilst we are on earth or not, we will experience the coming of the Lord at our death: and we will be judged.

Just as the the Most Blessed Virgin Mary heard the annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel so we listen for the voice of God amidst a period of stillness. The Blessed Virgin conceived of the Word of God in her womb because she heard the voice of God’s messenger. We must, in our own way, conceive of the Word of God, by listening to the voice of God amidst the holy Scriptures, the Tradition of the Church, and in the holy Mass and the sacraments. Although Advent is not a penitential season as such, it is a season which gives the opportunity to reorient ourselves, to shed that which is unimportant and reclaim that which is necessary.

It is so very important that we live in expectation and not settle ourselves or grow apathetic. We live, not for this world only, but for the world to come, and we choose in our lives what that world will be; whether it will be with God and all His Angels and Saints in Paradise, or eternal damnation in Hell. Sadly, there are many who will not be prepared to attend Mass each week this Advent but, instead, will show up at Christmas, thinking that it is the only Mass that matters. Do not let this season of Advent go to waste but embrace it. We can only understand what we celebrate at Christmas by participating in the preparation the Church gives to us through this season of Advent; a time of preparation where we ready ourselves to go out and meet the Lord. And anything worth doing is worth doing well.