

First Sunday of Advent - A
Isaiah 2:1-5;
Romans 13:11-14;
Matthew 24:37-44
Little Flower - 11/27/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new Church Year. Every year, during Advent, the Church focuses on the three comings of Christ: his coming in history at Christmas, his coming into our lives and hearts today, and his future and final coming in glory.

The first part of Advent focuses more on Jesus' future and final coming in glory. In today's Gospel, Jesus points to the past to the days of Noah to warn his listeners to be prepared for his future coming in glory. He cautions them to stay awake because they do not know on which day or at what hour the Lord will come. Jesus concludes: "*So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.*" During Advent we prepare not only to celebrate Christmas, Jesus' historical coming, but also prepare for his final coming in glory.

In today's second reading, Paul cautions us that now is the time to wake from sleep because salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Paul calls us to put on the armor of light, i.e., to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we prepare for Jesus' final coming in glory by living the values Jesus lived and taught and growing into the likeness of the Risen Christ.

According to Isaiah, when the Son of Man returns all people will climb the Lord's mountain. Above all, God's kingdom, represented by the mountain, will be a kingdom of peace and reconciliation among all peoples: swords shall be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and nations will not raise the sword against each other or even train for war.

As I mentioned, today is the beginning of a new Church Year. Therefore, today is the Church's New Year's Day. Just as we make New Year's resolutions on January 1, I am going to suggest four resolutions for our Christian New Year, resolutions that are consistent with the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy which just ended.

Last Saturday Pope Francis suggested to the new cardinals "four actions that will shape, embody and make tangible the path of discipleship...: *love, do good, bless and pray.*"¹ He said most of us have no problem accepting these when it comes to our family, our friends, people we like, and people who are like us. Our challenge as disciples is to love, do good, bless, and pray for those who are not like us, those who are our enemies, even those who hurt us. At the Sermon on the Plain in Luke's Gospel, which parallels the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said, "*But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you*" [6:27-28]. By following this teaching of Jesus, we can prepare for and begin to anticipate the coming of God's kingdom, a kingdom of peace and reconciliation.

My brothers and sisters, each year on the First Sunday of Lent, we give you a little reminder to help you better celebrate Lent. This year we are going to give you a little Advent reminder titled "The Prayer Process" from Matthew Kelly and Dynamic Catholic. With all the busyness before Christmas, I think that if we follow this prayer process, our Advent will be more meaningful and will help us better prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas and his rebirth in our lives and hearts. Dynamic Catholic also has a free e-mail program titled "Best Advent Ever." If you go to dynamiccatholic.com, under "Catholic Moments," and then "Advent & Christmas," you can sign up for this as well to help you have your best Advent ever.²

¹Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Ordinary Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals, Vatican Basilica, Saturday, 19 November 2016, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161119_omelia-concistoro-nuovi-cardinali.html.

²<http://dynamiccatholic.com/best-advent-ever/>