

First Sunday of Advent - A
Isaiah 2:1-5;
Romans 13:11-14;
Matthew 27:37-44
Little Flower - 12/1/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year. During Advent, we prepare to celebrate Christ's historical coming 2000 years ago, his final coming in glory at the end of time, and his coming into our lives and hearts today.

During the first part of Advent, the Church focuses on Christ's final coming in glory. In today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.*" In other words, Christ will return in glory bringing the kingdom of God according to God's timetable. Nothing we do or do not do will hasten or delay the coming of God's kingdom. However, we are all called to prepare for the coming of the kingdom and to help others prepare for it as well.

We prepare for God's kingdom by living Gospel values in our own lives and helping others to live them in theirs. Paul's Letter to the Romans calls us to throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. According to Isaiah, if we walk in God's paths, "*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.*" If we live Gospel values, we will live as one family, God's family, brothers and sisters of one another in Christ.

Last Sunday marked the end of the Year of Faith. The Year of Faith was intended to form the foundation for the New Evangelization. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature*" [16:15]. This is the mission of the Church and the vocation of every Christian.

As a parish, if we want to answer Jesus' call, one of our goals needs to be re-evangelizing those who have simply stopped coming. As in most parishes, many of our parishioners no longer come regularly. As a community and as individuals, we need to look for ways to reach out to them with sensitivity and invite and encourage them to return. This might include listening attentively and respectfully to the reasons they no longer attend. This might include accompanying them to church, sitting with them in church, and introducing them to others.

Second, throughout our history, we, like most parishes, operated on the assumption that Catholics and those wanting to become Catholic would come to us. Historically, Little Flower was a destination parish. Older realtors tell us that Catholics wanted to move to Little Flower. At one point, we had more than 1800 families and 5000 parishioners. We did not have to reach out or evangelize. Now we do, not only because we are a smaller parish, but also and more importantly because it is our mission and vocation as Catholics.

In this new model, the liturgical ministries of greeters and ushers would be critical. Greeters would not only welcome people but also ask the names of visitors and new parishioners and introduce them to others. All of us would become more intentionally welcoming. We would take the time and make the effort to introduce ourselves to visitors and new parishioners and perhaps to introduce them to others. Greeting and welcoming visitors and new parishioners would become a priority for all of us.

In older parishes like ours, parishioners often lament when Catholics move out of the neighborhood. However, someone once said that for everyone who moves out, someone else moves in. Since we can no longer assume that Catholics and those interested in becoming Catholic will seek out the parish, we, as individuals and as a community, have to seek them out. In this new model, parishioners would take the initiative to meet and welcome their new neighbors and invite them to Little Flower.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, in this new model, as a community and as individuals, we would look for ways to serve the needs of the larger community within our parish boundaries. Serving those in need evangelizes far more powerfully than any words we can speak.