

1st Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7;
I Corinthians 1:3-9;
Mark 13:33-37
Little Flower - 12/3/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent and the beginning of a new Church Year. Every Advent, we prepare to celebrate the three comings of Christ: his historical coming 2000 years ago, his coming into our lives and hearts today, and his future and final coming in glory. Paradoxically, at the beginning of Advent, the Church asks us to focus on Jesus' future and final return in glory, i.e., his Second Coming, and then at the end of Advent to focus on his historical coming 2000 years ago, i.e., on his Incarnation and birth. Throughout Advent we are called to open our lives and hearts to Him today.

Today's Liturgy invites us to look forward to Christ's coming in glory. When the Prophet Isaiah wrote, "*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...*," he was praying for the coming of God's kingdom. Today we pray for Christ's return in glory every time we pray the "Thy kingdom come" when we say the Our Father.

In today's Gospel, Jesus warns us to be watchful and alert because we do not know when he will return. Although Jesus is speaking primarily about his return in glory at the end of time, we are also being warned to be prepared for his coming for us at the hour of our death. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus uses many parables to teach us that we will be held accountable for our lives.

As much as none of us wants to think about Christ returning in glory and the end of the world as we know it, even less do most of us want to think about our own death. Christ certainly does not want us to be preoccupied with death. He wants us to live life fully. However, we can only live life fully if we model our lives on his life and become the-best-version-of-ourselves by living lives of faith, love, and hope.

One of my favorite verses from Isaiah is found in today's first reading: "*Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.*" Many years ago, there was a young woman who matured late on many levels. When she started developing physically, she became a strikingly beautiful young woman. Many people complimented her mother on her emerging beauty. Her mother, however, always had the same answer, "God is not finished with her yet." This captures the meaning of this verse. God is not finished with us yet. In fact, God will never be finished with us if we allow him to shape and fashion us.

During Advent, we are called to prepare for and welcome Christ within us. We are called to allow him to shape and re-shape our lives. If we want to welcome Christ within us, we need to make time and space for him. We need to create some silence so that we can listen to him speak to us in the depths of our hearts. During Advent I would suggest that our prayer needs to be more listening than speaking. If we want to model ourselves on Jesus, we have to know him. Therefore, I would suggest that we read from the Gospels daily. Finally, we need to allow the Holy Spirit into our minds and hearts. At you leave Mass, please take one of the Advent Little Blue Books located at the doors to help you enter into the spirit of Advent.

My brothers and sisters, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul thanked God on their account because of the grace of God had bestowed on them. Like the early Corinthian Christians, God has blessed each of us with the gifts of his life and love. If we are ever tempted to be discouraged that we are not all that we should be, we need only remember that "*God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*"