

1st Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7;
I Corinthians 1:3-9;
Mark 13:33-37
Little Flower - 11/30/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent, 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, the Liturgical season of Advent focuses first on Jesus' return or Second Coming and then on his historical coming, his Incarnation and birth. Preparing for his coming into our lives and hearts today is a focus throughout the entire season. For Christians Advent should be a season of hope and expectation as we confidently await the fulfillment of God's promises.

However, as we look around the world and at our own lives, we can find all kinds of reasons not to hope: Ebola, ISIS, the persecution of Christians throughout much of the Middle East, Russia's incursion into the Ukraine, Iran seeking nuclear weapons, the riots in Ferguson, Missouri, abject poverty in o many parts of the world, and injustices in throughout the world. Many of us are struggling with the death of family members and friends, wounded or broken relationships, illness, aging, joblessness, and lack of money. Today many people feel the absence of God more than his presence.

For many people, our reading from Isaiah could have been written today. It contains both a hint of despair and a sense of urgency: *"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old."*

At the same time, in today's second reading, St. Paul gives thanks to God for the grace, the gift, God bestowed on the Corinthians in Christ Jesus. In other words, St. Paul affirms that God has indeed rent the heavens and come down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. That same grace or gift has been extended to us. However, the most important verse in this reading is the final verse: *"God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* Because of our fellowship with Jesus, we can be confident that no matter what is happening in the world or in our own lives, God will always be faithful to his promises.

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges us to be watchful and alert. On one level, he is calling us to be prepared for his final coming in glory. We can also interpret this to mean that we must be prepared when he comes for us at the end of our earthly life. However, perhaps it can also mean that we have to be watchful and alert for all the many ways God comes to us in our lives every day. In other words, if we are not watchful and alert, we will miss the opportunities to experience his awesome deeds in our own lives and in the life of the world.

My brothers and sisters, Advent is a time of hope and expectation. As we look forward to Christ's future and final coming in glory, we need to be confident that God is always faithful to his promises. Celebrating Christmas well will boost our hope. Therefore, during Advent and Christmas, please be sure to celebrate Eucharist, spend time in prayer, spend quality time with family and friends, give gifts generously and receive gifts graciously, and decorate homes and offices festively.