

1st Sunday of Advent - C
Jeremiah 33:14-16;
I Thessalonians 3:12-4:2;
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36
Little Flower - 12/2/12

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new Church year.

The word *advent* means coming. Our three readings today speak to the three comings of Christ. The reading from Jeremiah prophesies the coming of Christ in history. St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about how we are to live in the present to welcome Christ into our lives and hearts today. The Gospel looks forward to the final coming of Christ in glory at the end of time. All three readings convey a sense of hopeful anticipation. Jesus said, “...*stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.*”

Our Liturgies during the first part of Advent look forward with hope to Christ’s coming in glory. During the second part of Advent, our Liturgies look back with joy and gratitude to the coming of Christ in history, the birth of Jesus. The two comings are tied together by an emphasis on Jesus’ coming into our lives and hearts each and every day.

Advent is a season of new beginnings. Today marks the beginning of a new Church year. However, tomorrow will mark the beginning of a new chapter in the history of our Archdiocese with the installation of Archbishop Joseph Tobin as the sixth archbishop of Indianapolis. This Advent it would be good for us to pray for the Archbishop and the Archdiocese.

Last Tuesday, the priests gathered for a day of prayer led by Capuchin Franciscan Fr. Jack Rathschmidt. He told the story of his first pilgrimage to Assisi as a young friar. The older friar who was leading the group asked them to see Assisi as pilgrims, not as tourists. Tourists simply pass through the places they visit, taking lots of pictures to remind them of their visit. Pilgrims, however, allow themselves to be transformed by the journey and by the people and places they visit. Pilgrims take the time to be thankful for what they have seen and experienced; tourists do not.

As we begin a new church year and a new chapter in the history of our Archdiocese, I think Fr. Jack’s story provides a good metaphor for us. We often say that our life is a journey. We might ask are we tourists or pilgrims on the journey. Do we allow ourselves to be transformed by the journey, or do we simply pass through? Do we live lives of wonder and awe and gratitude for all the good times and, yes, even the bad times in our lives?

As I mentioned last Sunday, we are called to give witness to Christ by our lives, and today’s reading from Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians and today’s Gospel remind us how we are to live and that we are accountable before God for our lives and choices. Do our homes contain Christian and Catholic symbols? In other words, would visitors who did not know us recognize that we are Catholic in our homes? As families, do we take time to share our faith with each other and pray together? One couple told me that every Sunday they and their children read and discuss the Sunday readings before Mass. Do we try to learn more about our faith? Do we make Sunday Eucharist a number one priority in our lives? In her stewardship talk, I really was impressed with the way Susan Spilly-Lee talked about how she and Frank have made stewardship a way of life not only for themselves but also for their daughter Elizabeth. Do we show gratitude in action by sharing with others? Do we try to simplify our lives and slow down?

My brothers and sisters, every year it seems that time passes more quickly. At the end of next year, will we look back at another year that passed too quickly and regret it or will we look back with gratitude at another year that we lived fully and look forward with hope to another year to be lived fully?