

1st Sunday of Advent - A  
Isaiah 2:1-5;  
Romans 13:11-14;  
Matthew 24:37-44  
Little Flower - 12/1/19

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 readings for the first part of Advent focus more on Jesus' future and final coming in glory.

For us at Little Flower, today marks a new beginning. We purposely chose to begin our new Mass schedule on the First Sunday of Advent because it marks the beginning of a new church year. Although it might seem like a small change, the change in Mass schedule also affects Sunday religious education, children's Liturgy, baptisms, and coffee and donuts. Also, some people have attended the same Mass and sat in approximately the same pew for many years. Therefore, in the next few weeks, many people will be meeting and worshipping with different people. Every year the First Sunday of Advent marks a new beginning and calls us to look forward. Today is a new beginning for Little Flower and calls us to look forward.

Today almost every organization does strategic planning. Before developing goals and objectives, an organization typically develops a mission statement and a vision statement. A mission statement expresses what an organization wants to do to accomplish its purpose. A vision statement expresses where the organization wishes to end up if it fulfills its mission.

The first reading today and the first reading next Sunday could be God's vision statement. Isaiah prophesied, "*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.*" God's vision for his people is peace and reconciliation in Jesus.

St. Paul speaks to the theme of peace and reconciliation time and time again. To the Galatians, Paul wrote, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" [3:28]. We have to remember that in those days, Jews considered themselves saved and everyone else not saved. The free were persons, and slaves were non-persons. Men considered themselves and were considered superior to women. According to Paul, because of Jesus, these distinctions no longer mattered: all are one in Christ Jesus.

The other passage comes from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: "*For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, ....This was to create one single New Man in himself out of the two of them and by restoring peace through the cross, to unite them in a single body and reconcile them with God...*" [2:14a-16a]. Jesus reconciles us to one another and reconciles us to God through the blood of his cross.

Although Jesus died and rose two thousand years ago, God's vision has not yet been realized in our world. Wars, conflicts, and divisions abound between countries and within countries. There are major divisions within the Catholic Church both in our country and in the worldwide Catholic Church. Although there will always be division and lack of peace until the coming of God's kingdom, it seems to me that these divisions are getting worse rather than better. Personally, I think the media and social media deserve a lot of blame for this.

My brothers and sisters, Paul wrote to the Romans, "*...it is the hour now for you to wake from sleep...Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.*" This passage suggests urgency. The basis for this urgency is found in the Gospel: "*For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.*" In the midst of wars, conflicts, and divisions, today's Liturgy challenges us to become proactive healers, reconcilers, peace makers, and bridge builders so that we may help to realize God's vision for the world.