

1st Sunday of Advent - B
Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7;
I Corinthians 1:3-9;
Mark 13:33-37
Little Flower - 12/3/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent and, therefore, the beginning of a new liturgical year. As I mentioned two weeks ago, the liturgical year does not correspond with the calendar year. The liturgical year begins with the First Sunday of Advent and ends on the Saturday following the Solemnity of Christ the King.

The Lectionary, our book of liturgical readings, follows a three-year cycle. This year we will be in year B. Therefore, most of the Gospel readings will come from the Gospel of Mark, the shortest Gospel and the first Gospel written.

During Advent we celebrate the three comings of Christ: his historical coming at Christmas, his coming into our lives and hearts today, and his future and final coming in glory. During the first part of Advent, we look forward to and prepare for his final coming in glory. During the second part of Advent, we prepare to celebrate his historical coming. Throughout Advent, we prepare to welcome Christ into our lives and hearts today.

Today's readings call us to look forward to Christ's coming in glory and his coming into our lives and hearts today. Jesus' message to his disciples in today's Gospel is blunt: "*Be watchful! Be alert. You do not know when the time will come,*" the same message we heard a couple of weeks ago. We cannot know the day or the hour when he will come in glory. Likewise, we cannot know when he will come for us at the end of our earthly life.

From the New Testament, we know that some early Christians expected an imminent return of Christ and, therefore, wanted to simply wait for his coming. In the little parable in today's Gospel, Jesus reminds them and us that we are not called to wait passively for his coming. We each have our own work to do, which is to live life fully by striving to become the-best-version-of-ourselves, which includes using our gifts and talents to proclaim the Gospel both in deed and in word.

However, it seems to me that today's reading from Isaiah offers us some beautiful images for Advent. Isaiah calls upon God to rend the heavens, i.e., to tear open the heavens, and come down with awesome deeds: "*No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him.*" If we want to prepare for Christ's coming in glory and his coming into our lives and hearts today, we need to have eyes of faith to recognize the awesome deeds God has done for us beginning with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and continuing in our lives today. We just celebrated Thanksgiving Day. If we see with eyes of faith and are honest with ourselves, although life is not perfect, we have received so many gifts throughout our lives, and we continue to receive gifts from God directly or through others. God has done awesome deeds for us.

Of course, one of the primary ways Christ comes into our lives and heart today is in the Eucharist. As the parish year of the Eucharistic Revival continues, if we look at the Eucharist with eyes of faith, we know that Christ comes into our lives and heart each time we celebrate Eucharist and receive Holy Communion, which deepens our union with God and our unity with one another.

My brothers and sisters, at the end of the reading, Isaiah wrote, "*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 in another parish, there was a girl who was a late bloomer, probably because of her mother's pregnancy complications. However, during high school she was turning into a beautiful young woman. Her mother told me that when friends would make comments to her about her daughter's beauty, she always responded, "God is not finished with her yet." During Advent, we need to remember that God is not finished with us yet.