

HOMILY ADVENT SUNDAY ONE – C

“Pray, Love and Be Ready”

(Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25; 1 Thes 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36)

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Happy New Year! Today, the first Sunday of Advent is the first Sunday of the liturgical year C. So again, Happy New Year.

The readings for this Sunday give us a clear message: be ready for the end of time by praying constantly and abounding in love.

There is a clear progression in the readings. Jeremiah tells us of a Son of David who will save us from our sins. We know that Son of David is Jesus, who in the gospel tells us he will come again as Son of Man at the end of time. Jesus warns us that the best way to be ready for that day is to pray constantly. St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians adds the admonition to abound in love.

Another way to express all this is to say that prayer and fellowship are two reliable ways to walk with God and be ready to greet Jesus when he comes again.

The New Interpreters Bible mentions that though it has been downplayed in mainline Churches, the coming of the Son of Man is an important theme of Jesus’ preaching. It was also important for St Paul in his epistles. The fact is that life comes to an end, lending urgency and significance to each new day. For those who have no faith or knowledge of God, death stands as the final denial of life. The ungodly, therefore, tend to live for themselves with little respect for others.

On the other hand, the Gospel teaches that beyond the end of time stands the Lord, who has come among us in the person of Jesus. Those whose lives are lived under Jesus’ lordship can live expectantly, filling each day with activity that is meaningful because of its divine mandate and its contribution to the fulfilment of God’s purpose for human life. The end of time holds no terror for those who know God’s love because they know the one who determines the reality that lies beyond what we can know here and now. Thus they can approach the end with heads held high, knowing their redemption is near.

That confidence flows out of a life of prayer and love. The disciple, grounded in these two realities, has nothing to fear.

Prayer has two dimensions for us as Catholics: liturgical prayer and devotional prayer. The best way to pray liturgically, publicly, is to celebrate the Eucharist together as a community. William Bausch, priest, pastor and scholar, describes the Church as “Jesus assembled.” The believing and worshipping community – Jesus assembled - are themselves the primary sacrament because they are the Church, which in turn is the sign of Christ.

He goes on to claim that the sacraments, like baptism or confirmation, are legitimate only as community celebrations of the mysteries of salvation. This is a totally different concept from most people who tend to see the Church only as an external, institutional structure they can blame if unhappy, or as a service center to dispense the sacraments at the individual's convenience. For Fr. Bausch, the Church is communitarian, engaging in a variety of ministries, bound by the living word of scripture, and nourished by a common Eucharist. It implies familiarity, relationship, unity and a deep sense of fellowship. It calls for community celebration and being grounded in the Word of God.

To make a renewed commitment to be totally involved in the worshipping faith community would be a great New Year's resolution for today. Then devotional prayer, such as the rosary, adoration, or gospel singing would find its rightful place and build on Eucharistic faith.

As there are two dimensions to prayer, there are also two dimensions to love, the second foundation for a confident Christian life, and that is caring and sharing.

We must, like Jesus, first of all truly learn to *care* for one another. That includes especially those we don't like, those who have hurt us. We must move towards letting go of anger, resentment and the desire for revenge. Eventually, we must move towards forgiveness and reconciliation through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus went so far as to say that we are to do good to those who hate us, bless those who persecute us, and ultimately, love our enemies as he did, forgiving them and dying for all.

Agnes is someone who truly lives the gospel. Shortly after being dismissed from her job because of band politics, she was the guest speaker at a Christopher banquet. She shared how the faith and love she experienced in the Christopher course gave her confidence to speak, and how the Cursillo weekend she had taken gave her the love to forgive. Now she wanted to be able to leave her job without too many hard feelings or bitterness. All this flowed from her faith in a God who loves her and is true to his promise.

The second aspect of love is *sharing*. That calls us into deeper fellowship with one another in trust and acceptance. It means moving towards greater intimacy with those we call our family and friends. It is by achieving intimacy that we will experience God who is intimacy, relationship, family. In the gospel of John, Jesus promises that he will reveal himself to those who truly learn to love one another, to share with one another intimately.

A little story illustrates the message of this homily. A selfish, proud woman who had little faith or love in her life on earth died and found herself in heaven. Used to getting her own way on earth, she expected a mansion in heaven. She was led by dozens of mansions but none were hers. She ended up at shabby old shack and was told that was all they were able to build with the materials she had sent up during her lifetime on earth.

The Eucharist we share today is a faith-filled meal where God's love is made present to us through word and sacrifice. It fills us with God's Spirit and a spirit of confidence, self-esteem and well being, if we celebrate with faith.

Let us pray for deep faith in God's love for us and strive to love others as God has loved us. We will be well on the way to celebrating a good Advent and a new Church year.

So, once again, Happy New Year and may God bless us all.