

# Luke 21:25-28, 34-36; 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent

December 1, 2024, Year C

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Today the Church begins a new year – a new liturgical year – and this new year begins with the First Sunday of Advent. The word advent means the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. For the Church, this means that the first four weeks of the liturgical year are a time set aside to prepare for the arrival of the most notable, most important person to ever live, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, King of the Universe, Savior of the World.

These four weeks of Advent have a dual meaning, and the first of these meanings is to prepare for the great Feast of Christmas where we will commemorate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ; His coming in poverty and humility, born of a virgin, born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothing, and lying in a manger. We celebrate this great feast because the cries for deliverance of ancient Israel have been answered. The Word of God present at the creation of the world has now entered into the world to redeem it from the dominion of sin and death that it has fallen into due to the disobedience of our first parents; Jesus entered the world to set free all those who believe in His most Holy Name. We will spend the next four weeks preparing for Christmas by recognizing the amazing gift we have received in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and also recognizing that we need to prepare our hearts for His coming by turning them back towards Him, seeking His Mercy and forgiveness, and repenting for the times we have not fully followed His Great Commandments to love the Lord our God with all hearts, souls, minds, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The second meaning of the Advent Season is to prepare for the fulfillment of our Lord's promise to "come again" at the end of time. Jesus' second coming will be different from His first, our Creed tells us He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom

will have no end. When Jesus comes again, He will not be coming in humility and poverty; He will come in power and glory and will have dominion over all of heaven and earth. His kingdom will come, and His Will - will be done. We are called by the Church to prepare our hearts for this time, again, by turning them back to Jesus and striving to accomplish His Will in our lives by following those Great Commandments to love God and our neighbor and also to ask for His Mercy and forgiveness for those times we have fallen short.

Because the Advent Season has the aspects of preparation and penance, similar to the Season of Lent, the color for the season is also purple, as you can see in the decoration of the Church and in the vestments worn by the ministers. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops tells us, “Advent also includes an element of penance in the sense of preparing, quieting, and disciplining our hearts for the full joy of Christmas.” I understand there will be a communal penance service on Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup> at 6 PM. Father John has made arrangements for a number of priests from the surrounding parishes to hear confessions. This is a great opportunity for all of us to prepare our hearts for Jesus’ coming by receiving the sanctifying grace available to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Today’s readings speak to the dual meanings of Advent. In our First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, we hear him prophesying that the Lord will fulfill the promises he made to the house of Israel and Judah. He says that He will raise up for David a just shoot and that he shall do what is right and just in the land. What is going on here? Jeremiah was a prophet to the Southern kingdom of Judah in the time leading up to and just after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonian Empire in 587 BC. This was a terrible and tragic time in Jewish history. Most of Jeremiah’s prophecies had to do with the doom that was going to befall Jerusalem if the king and leaders of the city, as well as the people,

did not repent and turn back to the Lord. But this prophecy is different. This prophecy is a messianic prophecy that speaks to the promise God made to king David, found in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, chapter 7, that said it was not for David to build a temple for God, but that his son would build the temple, and that his house, his kingdom, and his throne, would stand firm forever.

Jeremiah's prophecy came at a time when things looked really bad for David's dynasty, which was basically wiped out at the hands of the Babylonians, but Jeremiah's message was that somehow, despite all evidence to the contrary, God would raise up for David a righteous Son to fulfill His promise that David's throne would stand firm forever.

The Jewish people waited 587 years for this prophecy to be fulfilled and the Church today asks us to spend these next four weeks in expectant anticipation of the coming of the Messiah in solidarity with all those that hoped and waited and prayed for so long for this promise to be fulfilled. We know this prophecy was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, whose arrival we will celebrate with great joy this Christmas.

Another feature of beginning a new liturgical year is that we begin reading from a different Gospel. Today we are entering into the third year of the Church's three-year cycle of Gospel readings, what the Church calls "Year C," and that means that our Gospel readings for this upcoming year will be taken from the Gospel of Luke. As our first reading spoke to the First Coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas, our Gospel reading gives us Jesus' own prophecy about what is going to happen at the end of time leading up to His Second Coming. Jesus tells us that there will be a time of tribulation and great distress. There will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and that people will die of fright about what is going to happen to the world. But then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory. When Jesus speaks about "The Son of Man coming in a cloud", He is referring to a very important prophecy from

the Prophet Daniel, found in Daniel, Chapter 7, that tells of, “one like a Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” being brought before the Ancient One, who is sitting on a throne in heaven, and who gives this Son of Man dominion, glory, and kingship over nations and peoples of every language and that this dominion will be an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away. What Jesus is doing here is claiming Daniel’s prophecy for Himself, and these great signs that will shake the powers of the heavens, mean that Jesus will be coming in power and glory to take his place as King of heaven and earth. His kingdom will come. This will be a terrifying time for some, but it shouldn’t be for Christians, this is what we are praying for whenever we say the Our Father. We live in this time of tension about Jesus’ second coming. Yes, we want Him to come and make all things new, but we also thank God for giving us this time, to not only prepare ourselves, but to also help as many others come to know Him as we possibly can.

The rest of the Gospel reading is an exhortation to be vigilant, to be ready for that day. Jesus tells us to not let our hearts become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness, nor from the anxieties of daily life, so that day may not catch us by surprise like a trap. It is interesting to note that Jesus doesn’t just warn us about sin causing us to be distracted from seeing God’s signs in the world, it is also those anxieties of daily life, that we are all dealing with, those anxieties can be what keeps us from being ready to stand before Him.

How should we get ready? Jesus tells us we need to be vigilant and to pray. What are some practical things we can do to increase our vigilance and to prepare for Jesus’ coming? First, we can and should be living out the Sacramental life of the Church. This means going to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. Maybe, during Advent, add going to a daily Mass during the week. Go to the Penitential Service and receive the healing grace of Jesus’ Mercy. And if you can’t make that service, go to one of the many regularly scheduled times to receive the

Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you are not yet carving out time for daily prayer, Advent is a great time to start doing that. This can be as simple as setting aside a few minutes to check in with Jesus, and maybe share with him some of those daily anxieties, He wants to help us deal with them. If you haven't spent time in our adoration chapel, Advent would be a great time to start spending a few minutes in the presence of the Lord. The "secret code" is 1-2-0-Z. There are many other ways you can make small changes in your life that will help grow your relationship with the Lord. Advent should look and feel a little different than normal life.

We live in this Advent time, a time between Jesus' first coming; on that first Christmas Day, in weakness, poverty, and humility; and His second coming, where He will come in power and glory as a just judge and king. The "Good News" is that the victory has been won for us. That infant born on that first Christmas Day grew into the man who would pour out His life on that Cross for you and for me. Through Jesus' Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension we are saved. Jesus offers us this totally undeserved gift of eternal life with Him, but it is up to us to either receive or reject this gift, and the way we give our answer is in the way we live our lives. Today, Jesus gives us this exhortation, this warning, to be ready because He knows, one day, we all are going to find ourselves standing before Him, either on the day we die, or on the day He comes again. Jesus wants us to be ready. He went to a lot of trouble to become a man and to pour out His life on the Cross for us. He went to a lot of trouble to save us. He desperately loves you, and me, and He wants us to live with Him forever. I encourage all of us here today to take to heart his words, his warning, and to use this Advent Season as a time to make those needed changes, so that we will be ready, and on that day we find ourselves standing before our King and Lord, we will hear Him say those words we all long to hear, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."