

Reflection for the 1st Sunday of Advent

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my Soul"

This is the response, from the Responsorial Psalm for First Sunday of Advent and this response can be seen as summing up what the Advent Season is all about. This Responsorial Psalm is taken from the Psalm 25 which is classified as a Psalm of Lament, which at first glance might seem to be a strange type of Psalm to include in the readings for the First Sunday of Advent, but the writer of the Psalm mixes ardent pleas with expressions of confidence in God who forgives and guides. As we enter a Season that is a time of joyful waiting and preparing for the celebration of the birth of Christ, we are reminded that we have a God who forgives and guides us. This is a Season of joyful preparation and knowing that we have a loving and forgiving God that is present in our lives to guide us in our journey of faith, we are more able to embrace this Advent Season and lift our Souls to our Lord.

It is interesting to note that our Gospel reading this Sunday taking from the Gospel of Luke is not focused on the coming of Christ as an infant, but rather it is focused on the second coming of Christ and the fact that redemption is at hand. So, we start the Advent Season with a focus on the second coming of Christ. Then on the Second Sunday of Advent the Gospel reading focuses not on the second coming of Christ, nor on His birth, but rather on St. John the Baptist informing the world that the Messiah, at this time a grown man is about to begin His public ministry. The Third Sunday of Advent's Gospel reading informs us that the crowds coming to John the Baptist were wondering if he was the Messiah, John the Baptist answers this question by stating *"I am baptizing you with water but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* It is finally on the Fourth Sunday of Advent that we hear of events that happen before the birth of the Messiah, with the Gospel reading relating what happens when Mary visits Elizabeth.

The four weeks of the Advent Season, takes us on a journey of joyful preparation. The Sunday Gospel Readings for this Season clearly show us that this is a Season of movement that has a two-fold message of preparation. The start of the Advent Season is focused on the second coming of Christ and the end of the Season is focused on the first coming of Christ. What binds this two-fold message together is the last of the Prophets, the bridge between the old and the new covenant, St. John the Baptist. It is in the second and third weeks of the Advent Season that St. John the Baptist has a very important role in the readings. It is in these two weeks that St. John the Baptist provides the bridge between the messages of the first and second coming of Christ.

But noting that this Sunday is not the Second, Third, or Fourth Sunday of Advent, but the First Sunday of Advent, let us return to our response to the Responsorial Psalm for the First Sunday of Advent, *"To you, O Lord, I lift up my Soul"*, in Latin it is, *"Ad te, Domine, levavi animam meam."* Yes, this response can be seen as summing up the whole message of the Advent Season, but it might be better to see the response as providing the starting point for the four-week Season of Advent. We start the Advent Season with the First Sunday pointing out that we look forward to the second coming of Christ, because the first coming of Christ has taken place and has been successful. Christ has come into the world and has given His life for our salvation; this event has changed the world and has changed our lives. In this changed world we can celebrate the joy of the birth of our Savior and look forward to the Second Coming of Christ. Knowing this to be true may we lift our souls to the Lord in joy. This Advent Season is a Season of Joy, whether we are focusing on the first or second coming of Christ. What is important is Christ is there for us, from the beginning of time to the end of time, He is our light shining in the darkness. So, on this First Sunday of Advent may we embrace the joy of the Season of Advent by lifting up our souls to the Lord. May the message contained within our Sunday Readings at the start of our Advent journey lead us to the messages that are contained within the rest of the Advent Season, so that this Season is a time of growth and preparation in our daily lives.