

1st Sunday of Advent—A

Today we begin the season of Advent. Advent is a sacred season of anticipation and expectation in which we come to terms with the deepest yearning of our soul—a yearning fulfilled only in Christ. Advent celebrates the Lord's initial coming in humble humanity and his final coming in glory. It is a penitential period of preparation. To show its penitential nature, we use a purple color and do not sing the "Gloria" during Mass. During the season of Advent, we are preparing to celebrate Christmas once more. Our preparation ends on December 24th, and our celebration begins from December 25th, and lasts until the feast of the Epiphany. For the secular society, the Christmas celebration is over by December 25th. But not so for us Christians. For us the celebration only begins on Christmas Day. The time before that is preparation.

Our life in this world can become very hectic and take our attention and focus away from God. Therefore, the Church gives us this season to refocus, and get our attention back to God. It is a time to take a look at our life to see where we stand in relation to God. Are we lost in the ways of the world? Are living a life unmindful of the fact that the Lord can come at any time? Have we lost sight of eternity in our efforts to make a living? Are we living like the people of Noah's time—eating, drinking, and making merry? If these become central values of our lives, then the outcome is obvious: obesity, drunkenness, and dissipation.

The readings of today invite us to be alert and watchful. To maintain a state of alertness, there is a struggle involved. There was a man who had his more than usual share of wine. He was attending the Church service, and he could not keep his eyes open. He was nodding during the homily, and the pastor noticed it. So, at one point the pastor yelled, "All those who want to go to hell, stand up." This man heard only "stand up"—not the rest. So he woke up and stood up. Looking around, he found only himself standing up. Embarrassed and confused, he said to the pastor, "I don't know what we're voting on, but it seems it's only you and me who are standing up."

Alertness and watchfulness are more important today than ever before. St. Paul in the second reading says, "It is the hour now for you to wake from sleep." In our busy lives, it is very easy to lose our focus and have our eyes fixed on things of this earth. Our hearts gets darkened by gluttony, drunkenness, and cares of this life. Thus we may be losing the supernatural dimension of our life. Things that help us to be alert and watchful are personal prayer, sacrifices, and examination of conscience. Personal prayer enables us to avoid lukewarmness in our faith. Making little sacrifices every day helps us to not lose sight of heaven. Daily examination of conscience helps us to be on the right path. So, this Advent season—especially this week—let us pay attention to our personal prayer, daily sacrifices, and examination of conscience. This will help us to prepare for the coming of our savior.

Joke: A man called his family dentist and asked how much it was to extract a tooth. The dentist said that it would cost \$85. Because the man complained that it was too much, the doctor said that if he did not use the anesthetic, then it would be \$75. Then the doctor said that if he did not take the anesthetic and his assistant did the extraction, it would be \$40. But that was still too much for the man. So the man asked how much it would be if one of his students extracted the tooth. The dentist said that it would be \$20. The man asked how much it would be if he used it as a teaching moment with other students present. The dentist said that it would only cost him \$5. The man then said, "Please schedule an appointment for my wife."