

# 1st Sunday of Advent

Bishop Sheen was once in Philadelphia to give a talk in the town hall, but he did not know how to get to the town hall. It was in the days before GPS, and so he needed directions. He saw a group of boys hanging out at the street corner and asked them for the directions. After giving the directions, one of the boys asked him why he was going there. He said, "I am going there to give a talk on how to get to heaven. Do you want to come?" The boy said, "If you do not know how to get to the town hall, I am not sure you know how to get to heaven."

Humanity had lost its direction, so God sent his only son, Jesus, into this world to give us the direction to get to heaven. The gospel of Christ is the way to heaven. Today we are beginning the season of Advent. It is a time of preparation, and it is a time of waiting. We are preparing to celebrate once again the first coming of the Son of God. This season also reminds us that we need to be ready for the second coming of Christ as well.

In the first reading of today, Jeremiah says that God's promises were fulfilled in Jesus. In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that, as we wait for the second coming, we need to exercise love for one another. In the gospel of today, St. Luke exhorts us to wait actively with prayers and careful watchfulness. Waiting is not easy for most of us. I hate waiting. The first time I had gone to India on a home visit, I flew from Redmond to San Francisco. I had a layover in San Francisco for six hours. I did not think I could take it. So I called a couple of my friends in the Bay Area. They came to pick me up, and we went for dinner and a drive, and when I got back to the airport, I had only two hours more. I could handle that. But then I had an eight-hour layover in Singapore. When I got into Singapore, I went to the terminal of my next flight, I walked around looking at all the wonderful displays in the shops. But that killed only two hours. I had six more hours left. Then in one place I found a note, "Free City Tour." I enquired about the details and found out that they offered a free tour of the city for anyone passing through Singapore. I said, "Yes! Thank God." I signed up for it right away, and they took us on a bus for a wonderful tour of the city. When they brought us back, I had only two more hours left. Another time I was travelling from one city to another in India. The train that I had reserved my ticket on should have come in at 2 p.m., but it didn't arrive until 7 p.m. They did not offer a city tour there! I just had to wait.

Advent calls not for passive waiting but active waiting. Jesus says, "Be watchful! Be alert." On January 13, 2012, the cruise ship *Costa Concordia* ran aground off the coast of Italy. Most people realized that something was going wrong and got to safer places. But there were two couples who thought that there was nothing wrong and continued playing cards in their cabin. When they realized that there was something wrong, it was too late. They were among the 32 who lost their lives. Advent invites us to be watchful, alert, and not be lost in the things of this world. Jesus warns us, "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of life." We can be so caught up with this life that we can easily lose sight of the fact that this life is only a preparation for the life to come.

Advent is a good reminder that we need to be alert and prepare by prayer. It is an opportunity to look back at our lives to see what needs to be put right. It is a time to forget what we have done for others, but to remember what others have done for us, to ignore what the world owes us, and to think of what we owe the world, to forget about our rights, but to remember our duties, to stop complaining, and count our blessings. Let us focus on these this week as we prepare for the coming of the Son of God.