



## First Sunday in Advent

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On the night of April 15, 1912, when the world was asleep, the *Titanic* hit an iceberg and killed more than 1,500 people in one of the worst sea disasters in history. A few years ago, a magazine recalled that disaster and asked its readers a shocking question “If you were on the *Titanic* when it sank, would you be rearranging the chairs on the deck?” What a ridiculous question! Would anyone in their right mind ignore the danger alarm of the ship and shouts of drowning people to rearrange the chairs on the deck? But, as we continue to read the article, we see the reason for the strange question, and we begin to ask ourselves, “Are we rearranging chairs on the deck of our life that is fast disappearing? Are we so caught up in material things in life that we are giving a backseat to spiritual things? Are we so busy making a living that we forget the purpose of life?” These are the questions that we are asked as we begin the season of Advent.

The word “Advent” is now a Christian term, but originally it was used by pagans to refer to the annual visit of their deities. In the secular context it meant the first official visit of the king to a place. For us Christians, Advent signifies two things: It recalls Christ’s coming among us, inaugurating the messianic age and reminds us of His second coming at the end of time. It is a season to prepare for Christmas when we remember His first coming. That remembrance directs our minds and hearts to await Christ’s second coming. It is a time of preparation and a time of devout and joyful expectation.

The meaning and purpose of advent are well explained in the prayers of the Mass and in the readings. The prayers of the Mass refer to Christ’s coming in history, His coming at the end of time, and His coming in the Eucharist.

In the opening prayer of the Mass today, we read, “Almighty God, grant us the resolve to run forth to meet Christ with righteous deeds at his coming.” The prayers after Communion beautifully merge all the three comings of Christ. The preface of the Mass is the prayer the priest says

before we sing “Holy, Holy.” In the preface that the priest says up to December 15, the relation between His first coming and second coming is very evident. The second preface, used from the 16th to the 24th, draws our attention to Jesus’ human birth. So, not only do the readings speak to us, but also do the prayers of the Mass. Therefore, pay attention to these prayers. Tune in when the priest reads these prayers. Do not tune out.

We are here to pray. It is the time we have set aside for this. It is the expected hour. How attentive have you been since you walked in? If you were distracted, what were the causes of your distractions? If we cannot be attentive to the Lord at this expected hour, how prepared will we be when he comes at an unexpected hour? Today’s readings are a *wakeup call*. It wakes us up and tells us, “Hey, there is someone coming, are you ready?” Next Sunday is a call to prepare for way of the Lord. The 3rd Sunday focuses on the messianic times and the 4th Sunday on the Annunciation. So, today on the first Sunday of Advent, the readings wake us up and ask, “Hey, are you arranging the deck chairs of a sinking ship? Are you so caught up with this life, forgetting that it is only a preparation for the life to come?”

I am sure you received the Annual Stewardship material in the mail. If you have not, we have some on the Baptismal font and in the narthex. I hope it does not get lost in your busy holiday activities. I have turned mine in, and I hope you will turn in your commitment card without delay.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel: “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and anxieties of daily life. Be vigilant at all times and pray.” A few years ago a Hollywood actor suddenly became ill. His doctor checked him and said that he had to be operated on within 36 hours if he was to have any chance to live. Later on, the actor said, “I learned more about life in those 36 hours than in 36 years of my life.” That is waking up to what we are in life and where we are in life. So the message for the first Sunday of advent is “wake up, watch, and pray—for the Lord is coming.” The Lord should not find us unprepared when He comes. He should not catch us by surprise. Happy is the person who can say when the Lord comes, “Welcome, Lord. All these years I have been watching and waiting.”