

## Homily of First Sunday of Advent Year B, 2023

Isaiah 63:16-17, 19, 64:2-7; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Gospel 13:33-37

This Sunday marks the beginning of the Advent season and a new liturgical year. We are, now, in Cycle B.

Prior to Vatican II, the same selected texts were read every Sunday of the year and restarted the following year. There were no readings for daily Mass. The Sunday readings were read through the week. Following the reforms of Vatican II (1962 to 1965), the Catholic liturgical year and lectionary for Sundays and weekdays were divided into a three-year cycle (A, B, and C), in order to provide a comprehensive reading from almost all the books of the Bible over the course of a three-year period, to enable the people to read, hear, and know more the word of God.

Advent season is observed as a time of special preparation to mark the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a penitential, soul-searching, and spiritual reawakening journey to renew us to welcome the "Word Made Flesh." The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means *coming*.

Many churches are decorated with Advent wreath from this first Sunday of Advent. It is important to note that wreaths were used by many ancient cultures but the use of Advent wreath in churches is said to have begun among the Lutherans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and from there spread to other churches. Advent wreath further explains the meaning of Advent season:

The green wreath in circle shape symbolizes God's eternity and everlasting life (Psalm 90:2). Candle light symbolizes Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12). The four candles symbolize the four weeks of Advent. The first purple candle is called Candle of Hope. "In his name, the nations will put their hope" (Matthew 12:21). The hope that does not disappoint (Romans 5:5). The second purple candle is called Candle of Peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The third candle, pink in color, is called Candle of Joy. "Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy" (Luke 2:10). The third purple candle, which is the fourth candle, is called Candle of Love. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him may not perish, but have life eternal" (John 3:16).

The array of purple color of Advent season reminds us that the season is a penitential and a sobering journey. Also, Advent purple color foreshadows the sovereignty and the royalty of Christ. Purple was a kingly color.

Almost everybody, Christians, and non-Christians alike, in one way or another, prepare for Christmas celebration. The commercialization and socialization of Christmas are well known. However, for us Catholics, spiritual preparation is more important. When we expect a visitor, we get our house in order, we get food and drink ready, we clean up and dress well. If the house is in order, and food and drink well prepared, but the host appears shabby, the visitor will feel uncomfortable and may not stay for the meal. In the

same manner, our spiritual preparation makes us ready for Jesus to be born anew in us this Christmas. A good spiritual preparation makes every Christmas become the first Christmas. Let us pay attention to the readings of Advent season Masses. They will help us in the spiritual preparation.

The first reading is Prophet Isaiah's acknowledgment of and lamentation over the sins of the people of Israel and a plea for God's mercy. "Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves and our guilt carries us away like the wind" (Isaiah 64:6). In the same way, we are to acknowledge our sins and do something about them. True repentance of our sins and Sacrament of Reconciliation will help us in the spiritual preparation.

Today's gospel reminds us that spiritual preparation is important to keep us ready for the coming of Christ which can be at any moment, "whether in the evening, or at cockcrow, or in the morning" (Matthew 13:35).

Some spiritual steps to a good Advent season:

- Earnestly pray with and meditate on the themes of the four weeks of Advent Season: hope, peace, joy, and love.
- Participate in parish or group or community Advent season spiritual exercises such as retreat, revival, novena, prayer service, Penitential Service, Confession, etc.
- Perform personal acts of penance.
- Make spiritual resolutions to be closer to God.
- Reconcile with those you have difficult relationship.
- Do works of charity.

We wish one another a fruitful and Spirit-filled Advent season.

**Fr. Martin Eke, MSP**