

Homily of First Sunday of Advent Year C, 2021

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2;
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Many churches are decorated with the Advent wreath from this first Sunday of Advent. The Advent wreath is a Christian custom which is said to have originated among German Lutherans in the 16th century. Later, German Catholics adopted the custom, and from Germany the custom spread to North America and other parts of the world.

The meaning of Advent wreath: **Circle** symbolizes God's infinite love. **Green wreath** symbolizes hope of eternal life brought by Jesus Christ. **Four candles** represent the four weeks of Advent. **Candle light** symbolizes the light of God coming into the world through the birth of Jesus Christ. **1st candle, purple in color**, symbolizes hope. **2nd candle, purple in color**, symbolizes peace. **3rd candle, pink in color**, symbolizes joy. **4th candle, purple in color**, symbolizes love. **Purple color** symbolizes the penitential spirit of Advent season. Some Advent wreaths have a **5th candle, white in color**, in the middle of the wreath called Christ candle which symbolizes the birth of Christ.

This Sunday marks the beginning of the Advent Season and a new liturgical year. We are, now, in Cycle C. Advent is a season observed in the Catholic Church as a time of special soul searching and spiritual reawakening to mark the birth of Jesus Christ. Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means 'coming.' Advent season is a journey of preparing and welcoming the Word Made Flesh to renew his dwelling in each person and in the world.

Ordinarily, almost everybody, Christians and non-Christians alike, prepare for the celebration of Christmas. Business establishments started their preparation for Christmas business deals months ago. There is, usually, so much external preparation. For us Catholics, spiritual preparation is more important. When you are expecting a visitor, you will get your house in order, you will get food and drink ready, and you will also be clean and well dressed. If the house is in order, and food and drink are well prepared and arranged, but the host appears unkempt and shabby, the visitor will be embarrassed and may not stay for the meal. That is why spiritual preparation is necessary, so that there will be an inn for Jesus in our life this Christmas. Spiritual preparation makes every Christmas become the first Christmas.

The theme of the first week of Advent is hope. Our ultimate hope and desire is that through our spiritual preparations during Advent we will experience the blessings of the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in the first reading, "I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15). This Christmas, let us become a receptive land where the Lord's righteousness and justice will bloom.

While we are waiting in hope for a new experience of the birth of Christ, the first week of Advent requires us to become instruments of hope to others. St. Paul prays for us in the second reading, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all... so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before God and Father..." (1 Thessalonians 3:12). As Jesus is the hope of humanity, we, his followers, are to be signs of hope to our neighbors. It is by so doing that the season of Advent properly begins. The prayer of St. Francis says, "Where there is despair, let me sow hope." This is our prayer and action point this week.

The words of Jesus in today's gospel was his prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans which took place in 70 AD however, Jesus' words capture the tribulations in the life of many of us, and around the world. The Covid 19 Pandemic, wars, insecurity, killings, poverty, migration, refugee crises, unrests, persecution, and so on put all of us in fright and in dismay, and many people are dying. But Jesus warns us not to allow our hearts to be overtaken by worldly life and anxieties. Rather, we should be vigilant at all times and pray for the strength to escape. He encourages us to stand erect and raise our heads because our redemption is at hand.

Some spiritual steps to a good Advent season:

- Participate in parish Advent season spiritual exercises such as retreat, prayer, Penitential Service, and so on.
- Make Advent season spiritual resolutions to be closer to God.
- Go to Confession.
- Attend additional Masses along with Sunday Mass.
- Make peace with those difficult relationships.
- Do works of charity.
- Be devoted to the Word of God and to private prayer.

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

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP