

## Homily of First Sunday of Advent, Year C, 2024

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

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

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 the 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 faithful 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). The 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 the 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 the Candle of Peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). “He is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14). The third candle, pink in color, is called the Candle of Joy. “Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10). The fourth 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 royal color.

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 lives 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 are 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 receptive lands 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 one another. It is by

so doing that the season of Advent properly begins. The prayer of St. Francis of Assisi says, "Where there is despair, let me give hope." This is our prayer and action point this week.

The words of Jesus in today's gospel were his prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which took place in 70 AD. However, Jesus' words capture the tribulations in the lives of many of us and around the world. The wars, insecurity, killings, poverty, migration, refugee crises, unrests, persecution, and so on put all of us in fear 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 high 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 weekday Mass in addition to 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**