

First Sun Advent 2014

I'm a big football fan...I love football...Right now, we're in the most exciting part of the football season; the best teams are battling to get into the playoffs...At the same time, we're at the start of an exciting Church season— Advent ...So, this am/pm, I'm going to try to connect the game of football with today's Gospel...All you non-football fans, please bear with me... I promise Jesus' Gospel message will shine thru all the football jargon.

Did you ever notice that a football game has a lot of things in common with what goes on at Mass ...For example, football has a *quarterback sneak*...At Mass we have those people who quietly sneak out of church right after Communion....In football every team has *bench warmers*. ...At Mass, we have *pew warmers*,... people who don't sing or pray or do anything but sit in the pew...Football has *unsportsmanlike conduct*...which is like when that person next to you won't shake your hand at the sign of peace....In football there's something called *zone coverage*. ...That's like when some folks come to Mass – especially in the summer – with not all parts of their body covered...In football the players have a *pre-game workout*.In church,we work out **during** Mass standing up & sitting down 8 different times....Here's my favorite...In football the quarterback is supposed to *stay in the pocket*....At Mass that's what happens to a lot of money that should be put in the collection basket.

Ok, to be serious, none of these football terms relate to our Gospel...But here's one that does: *backup quarterback*...The backup quarterback watches from the sidelines while the starting quarterback plays the game,...& he only goes into the game if the starting quarterback gets hurt or is playing badly...He never knows when he is going to be sent into the game...He has to be ready when the coach calls...If he isn't ready...and does a lousy job,...he'll get sent down to the practice squad...

See the connection now?...Not yet?Well, let's look at what Jesus says to His disciples in our Gospel...He warns them to be watchful, be alert, be ready,...because you don't know when the time will come....Jesus is talking about being alert, being ready for His 2nd coming at the end of time...the day or hour of which no one knows except God the Father. ...Jesus wants His disciples - & that includes us – to be ready when He comes at the end of the world, ...or at the end of our life, whichever happens first ...He warns us to be ready because He doesn't want to find us unfaithful, unworthy when He comes.

You see the connection now?...If the backup quarterback isn't ready when the coach calls him, ...down he goes.If we're not ready when Jesus calls us, ..down we go...But here's where the analogy breaks down. ...When the backup quarterback is sent down, he has a chance to work hard & get back onto the team...If we're not ready when Jesus comes,...it's too late for us to work our way back onto His team...We had our chances...made our choices...When we're standing in judgment before Christ the King,...it's too late.

I remember an article written by a minister that told how he had gone to the funeral of a relative of one of the members of his congregation. It was in a small Baptist, country church. After the coffin was wheeled in, the crusty, old Baptist preacher began pounding on the coffin, shouting & fuming, "It's too late for Joe....He might've wanted to straighten out his life, but it's all over now for Joe...He's dead, ..but it ain't too late for you! So why wait?... Now is the day for decision. Now is the time to give your life to Jesus !" ...{This must've been a great source of comfort to Joe's family.} ...When he got home, the minister told his wife about the funeral. ..."It was terrible...Can you imagine a preacher doing that to a grieving family?...“No, I can't”,she answered,...”but off course, what's even more terrible is that what he said was true.” ..That preacher was brutally insensitive, but his message at that funeral.was the same as today's message from Jesus ...Jesus wants us to be ready on the day He comes for us.

Now Advent is a time of joyful expectation as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our savior... But Advent is also a time for us to seriously reflect on how we are to get ready to meet the Lord on our last day, ...because that is the day that will determine our eternal destiny.

So, what does Jesus want us to do to be ready?...In Luke 18:8, Jesus wonders aloud, "When I return, will I find faith on earth?"...Very simply, Jesus wants us to be FAITHFUL...During this season of Advent, each of us has to ask ourself,..." If Jesus came today, would He find me living a faith-filled life?"....Our answer will depend on what we think faith is...

So often we think of faith as all the things we believe about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit. ...A person can imagine that if he believes these things & he goes to church, & feels OK about his life,... then he's ready to meet the Lord....But that kind of thinking isn't what the Bible tells us....In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus laid it out very clearly...When we stand before Christ the King at the Final Judgment, we will not be judged for our beliefs. ...We will be judged for how our hands & feet & heart lived those beliefs... Faith is not a NOUN. ...Faith is a VERB,Faith is action...

Ok, so how do we put our faith into action?...I believe it goes back to what our Catechism tells us is the source & summit of the Christian life: the Eucharist... Everything we do as believers, as followers of Christ should flow from our celebration of the Eucharist...When we are dismissed at the end of Mass, we are given the commission to go & take everything that happened inside this building – our worship, our prayer,...our assurance of God's mercy, ...our reflecting on the Word of God,...our feasting on the Body & Blood of Christ – take all of it out into the world... because there are people out there who need to know the love of Jesus Christ in their lives...people who may never know His love unless WE bring it to them.

My friends, our faith has to be more than what we do in church... When we see something that is not the way it should be in the world,..we have to STEP OUT of the peace & comfort of our church building ...out into that world & do what we can to change it....If we think there is too much violence in the world,...we have to *step out*,...get involved in the lives of people at risk from violence right here in our community,...If we think unwed pregnant women should have options other than abortion,...we have to *step out* & make sure they have the resources & the love they need to give their children life & not death....If we **don't** think the poor are well cared for,...we have to *step out* & not wait for government or anyone else to do something about it. ...When we see people treated unjustly because of their race or other kinds of prejudice, we have to *step out* & stand up for Jesus' way of respecting ALL people...

And when we see something that is not how it should be in our own lives,...we have to *step out* & do what we know Jesus wants us to do to change it...TODAY!,...because only God knows if tomorrow is going to come. Today we should tell those we love how we feel about them...Today we should forgive that person who hurt us,... and say "I'm sorry," to the one we hurt....Today we need to kick that sinful habit...get right with God, go to confession ...Today is the day to get involved in that charity or that cause we feel so strongly about...

And all you young people,...today is the day for you to step out! When your so-called friends try to talk you into taking that drink...or smoking that joint...or engaging in sex,...today is the day to say to them, "I don't think so, baby!" ...Today!.. Because today could be the last day we have to prepare for Jesus

My friends, today's Gospel message is very simple... Jesus wants us to be prepared when it comes time for our final exam...He wants us to not only pass the final exam, he wants us to ace it,...so that we can enjoy eternity in the heavenly home God intended for all of His children...The Good News is that as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' first coming at Christmas & as we await His 2nd coming at the end of the world,...we still have Him right here with us, ...here in the

sacred words of the Gospels,... here in the power of the Holy Spirit reminding us of all that Jesus has told us,...here in His precious Body & Blood that strengthens us to live His way. So, let this be our prayer during Advent:...*Lord Jesus , I don't want some insensitive preacher pounding on my coffin at my funeral, ...so please, ...please, don't ever stop helping me, changing me, making me ready for the day you come... Amen!!!*