

Homily First SUNDAY of Advent – Year C 2009

OK, here we are on the 1st Sunday of Advent...the time in the Church year when we are preparing to welcome the Christ child...You know,...Silent night, holy night...angels appearing to shepherds in the field...Peace on earth, goodwill to men...So, then, can anyone tell me why we needed to hear Jesus' words in today's Gospel, "nations will be in dismay...over the roaring of the sea and the waves. ...people will die of fright. ...the heavens will be shaken....the Son of Man will be coming in a cloud of power and glory."? ...Huh. Isn't that all about Christ's 2nd coming at the end of the world? ... Why do we need to hear about that when we should be getting into the Christmas spirit?...

Well, if we think about it, ADVENT means "coming"...It's a time when we prepare for Christ's coming into the world...Not only His 1st coming as a tiny infant wrapped in swaddling clothes lying away in some manger,...but also His 2nd coming when He will return to wipe out all sin and evil in the world, once and for all, make all things right,...and take all who have been faithful to Him to everlasting joy in heaven. ...Advent is not just about Christmas carols and frankincense and getting all the gifts bought for our family and friends...It's about remembering that before He left, Jesus told us that He would be coming back...He also told us we would know neither the day nor the hour of His return...In fact, He said even He didn't know...Only the Father in heaven knows...Now, over the centuries we've had all kinds of theologians and psychics and fiction writers telling us when the world was going to end,...and so far they've all been wrong...Even now, the movie "2012" is scaring the wits out of some people. ...You have to wonder if these doomsday prophets think they know more than Jesus...If we're not going to believe what Jesus said, then what are we doing here? Let's pack up and go home.

I think God knew that if He gave us the precise time when Jesus would return, many of us would not worry about living right,...we wouldn't worry about following Jesus...until the last minute. ...That's only natural isn't it?...It's like when my little brother Joey and I, on days when it was too rainy or cold, ...we'd be in the house running wild, driving our poor mother crazy, making all kinds of racket, ...and she'd be yelling to us, "Stop that running around...play something quiet. ...Just wait 'til your father gets home!"...Do you think that stopped us?...Nah. We knew when Dad was due home from work...So we would keep on bouncing off the walls until just a few minutes before we expected him to pull into the driveway...Then we'd magically turn into little angels, and sit quietly on the floor playing with our tinkertoys...Of course, on those days when our Dad would go out someplace and we didn't know when he would be back...then we'd have to play it safe and behave like good little boys because Dad could be walking in the door any minute.

So, the 1st part of Jesus' message is very simple: "**I'm coming back!..But you won't know when.**" ...The 2nd part of His message is even simpler: "**Be ready!**" ... Listen again to His words: "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and **THAT** day catch you by surprise like a trap... Be vigilant at all times., ...pray that you have the strength to stand before the Son of Man." ...Let me paraphrase this in words we are more familiar with in the Christmas season: "You better watch out...you better not cry...you better not pout, I'm telling you why...Jesus Christ is coming to town!...He's making a list, checking it twice, He's gonna find out who's naughty and nice..." Yep, He's coming, and He wants us to be ready when He comes for for us...whether it's at our death, or at the end of the world...Because there will be a judgment...We are reminded of that every time we pray the Creed as we say, "He will come again to judge the living and the dead." ...

For those who totally ignore what is right and what is good,...who live only for themselves, ...who do not care about following God's commandments...who want nothing to do with loving God or loving neighbor,...for them, judgment will be bad news....It'll be much worse than getting coal in their Christmas stockings...But the Gospel we just heard - the Gospel of the 2nd coming of Christ - is about GOOD news, not bad...Jesus is not trying to scare us out of our wits. It's more like He's telling us, "I know if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake." ...He wants us to be ready when He comes...Then - as He tells us in today's Gospel- we can "Stand erect and raise our heads, because our redemption is at hand." ...That's the GOOD NEWS! ...Our redemption is at hand!...If on the day He comes for us, He finds us doing our best to live His way...the way of the Gospel ... we'll be able to stand tall, look Him in the eyes and all our past sins will be forgotten...He will say to us, "All is forgiven...Come with me to the place I have prepared for you."

Driving thru the village one day, I was stopped for a train...and I was behind a car that had one of those religious bumper stickers...that at 1st had me really stumped...I kept looking at it and finally figured out what it was saying...Let me show you...and see if you can get it faster than I did. (*Hold up sign*) ... The top line reads, "Jesus is coming!"...That's clear enough...Underneath that are the letters **R U E**. ...So what do you think that's saying?...*Hint: Did you notice the E is RED*....If you sound out the letters, it says **Are you red-E!** Are you ready?...Pretty clever. ...Jesus is coming! Are you ready?

Now do any of you get out of bed in the morning thinking, "Today could be the day Jesus is coming....I better get ready."?...I know I don't...It's more likely we get up thinking about what clothes we're going to wear...or all those errands we have to run...or that important meeting at work,...or that test I didn't study for enough...or how we're going to get our kids to practice. ...We have lives to live, places to be, work to do...Jesus knows this; He knows how busy our lives are, and that some of the busy-ness involves important stuff....But He also knows some of us have very important stuff that we haven't taken care of ...We either keep putting it off...or we have no intention of doing it...It's stuff He doesn't want to find undone when He comes...He doesn't want to catch us off guard...He wants these things to be taken care of...He wants us to be ready when He comes....He didn't suffer and die on the cross for us, only to have us blow it in the end....So, let's not blow it!... Let's make this Advent season more than mistletoe and malls, tinsel and trees, presents and parties....Let's use this time of Advent to get ready for Jesus!...

Let's use this time to take a real hard look at our lives...and if there are any things there that would keep us from holding our heads up high in the presence of our Savior when He comes, ...if there R things we're doing that we know Jesus doesn't want us to do,...or things we're not doing that we know Jesus wants us to do,...then let's clean up our act...let's get rid of everything that keeps us from fully welcoming Christ into our hearts, into our lives, everything that keeps us from being the people God created us to be...

Strengthened by the Eucharist, by Jesus coming to us in the Eucharist,...we can start right here, right now...If we would do that...if we would do that, my friends, there would be no better birthday gift we could give the Christ-child. It would be a gift more precious to Him than all the gold, and frankincense and myrrh from all the wise men who ever lived. AMEN.

