

1st Sunday of Advent - C
Jeremiah 33:14-16;
I Thessalonians 3:12-4:2;
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36
Little Flower - 12-1-24

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new Church year.

The word *advent* means coming. Our three readings today speak to the three comings of Christ. The reading from Jeremiah prophesies Christ's coming in history. The Gospel looks forward to Christ's coming in glory at the end of time. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul writes about preparing for Christ's coming in glory by welcoming Christ into our lives and hearts today.

Today's Gospel is the same Gospel that was always read on the First Sunday of Advent in the pre-Vatican II Mass. Likewise, in the pre-Vatican II Mass, the Gospel for the last Sunday of the Church year was always Matthew's version of Christ's return in glory. Christ's return in glory can be seen through two very different lenses: the lens of fear or the lens of hope.

The images at the beginning of today's Gospel are certainly frightening images. Jesus even tells us that "*people will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*" The images in Matthew's Gospel are even more frightening: "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken*" [24:29].

At the same time, Jesus, in today's Gospel, also tells us that after all these signs we will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Therefore, when these signs begin to happen, we are told to "*stand erect and raise [y]our heads because [y]our redemption is at hand.*"

If we read these Gospels through the lens of fear, we will focus on the images and, therefore, on the end of the world as we know it. If we read them through the lens of hope, we will focus on Christ's return in glory and the coming of God's kingdom. Our basic Christian disposition will largely determine how we read them. Fearful people will read them through the lens of fear. Hopeful people will read them through the lens of hope.

Scripture scholars suggest that Jesus used these apocalyptic images to tell us that, unlike his first coming, when he comes in glory, his coming will be dramatic and everyone will recognize him. Christologist Fr. Jean Galot argued that when Christ returns in glory, the great revelation will be that he has been with us all along. In other words, Christ is already here. We believe Jesus is really present in his Word, especially the Gospels. We believe Jesus is really present in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. We believe Jesus is really present in His Spirit within us and others. Our challenge today is to see and recognize him.

At his introductory press conference, Archbishop Tobin defined faith as the capacity to be surprised by God:

If you look at Scripture, it is full of a lot of surprised people, people in exile, people forgotten, a world that thought that God lived worlds beyond the last star, only to discover that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son....We allow God to surprise us because we know that God is faithful.

My brothers and sisters, the Sacrament of Reconciliation or confession is a privileged encounter with the mercy of Christ, the mercy of God. Therefore, I want to invite and encourage you to participate in our Advent Reconciliation service with Our Lady of Lourdes this Wednesday evening, December 4, at 7 p.m. here at Little Flower.