

**Homily for the 1st Sunday of Advent – Cycle C
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois
November 28, 2021**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Our Mass today begins a new liturgical year on this First Sunday of Advent. The emphasis running throughout the Scriptures chosen for this season is watchfulness. That watchfulness is now expressed in apocalyptic language filled with emotion and expectation. Powerful and cosmic signs will accompany the coming Son of Man. Thus the Advent liturgy emphasizes constant vigilance rooted in prayer.

But we might well ask: What are watching for? What are we expecting to happen? Perhaps the following story may help illustrate the hope and expectation for which we are called to be vigilant.

An elderly woman had been living in a nursing home for years. She had lost the ability to perform many everyday tasks for herself, but she had retained the use of her hands. With these hands she produced the most beautiful embroidery. One day she showed a visitor her latest creation, a beautiful pattern of flowers and birds. “This,” she said, “is the way God sees

our world: a thing of beauty, ordered and harmonious." Then, reversing the material, she showed the other side: the little tufts and loose ends, the irregular patterns. "And this," she added, "is the world we see: disordered, problems unresolved, questions unanswered. But it will not always be like this. Next time you come I will have tidied up that side too and it will be as good as the other. This is what God will do at the end of time. God will tidy up what human beings have disturbed, and put right what has gone wrong."

At first glance, today's scripture readings seem to come from another world. Jeremiah looks forward to honesty and integrity in the land. Paul expects us to live a blameless life as we wait for Christ to come. And Jesus speaks of a day when "the powers of heaven will be shaken."

Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus point us to a world beyond the one in which we live. Like our world today, Jeremiah's words were spoken in a time of conflict and division, as the Babylonian armies began their destruction of Jerusalem. Paul wrote when the first Christians were beginning to despair under the pressure of persecution. And Jesus' words came as He faced the prospect of His passion and death; it was a time when His teaching about God's love met opposition from an unbelieving world.

How can we see the visions of today's readings as relevant to our lives and our world today? When we look at the world using our own eyes, it can appear broken and confusing, as if we were looking at the back of the elderly woman's embroidery. But if we learn to look through the eyes of Christ, we can recognize something beautiful. We see a purpose in life; we are given true insight. The necessary "tidying up" may not come until the end of time when, in Jesus' words, the Son of Man will appear "with power and great glory," but the picture can already be recognized.

The season of Advent prepares us to look at the world through Christ's eyes: it prepares us for His coming into our lives in a deeper way. Sometimes people think that we prepare by ignoring the world we live in, or imagine that the difficulties of this life are an obstacle between ourselves and God. But Christ makes it plain that we prepare for His coming precisely by taking a searching look at this world and perceiving, through the disorder, the guiding hand of God. With Christ's insight we can recognize that God is truly with us.

Advent is a time set aside to stop and reflect on how Christ comes into our lives. First, Advent directs us to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. Our

faith is founded on a real event in human history: that in the birth of Jesus Christ, God came into the world as a human being.

Second, Advent directs our attention to Christ's coming in our everyday life. He comes when we least expect him: in the awkward person we have to deal with; when we are feeling unwell or tired with the difficulties of life. Our daily prayer can help us to prepare for those moments.

Finally, Advent directs us to Christ's coming for the last time – the “day [that] will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap.” If we have contemplated His coming at Christmas and in our daily life, this final coming will be no fearful scanning of the horizon, hoping we will not be caught unaware. It will be a welcoming of a Lord who has been as close to us as He is in our celebration of the Eucharist: a God with whom we have been in such close communion that we have learned to see the world through God's eyes.

The Eucharist is a vital part of our faith journey. It also prepares us to accompany others on their faith journey. Earlier this month the Catholic Bishops of the United States approved a teaching document on *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*.¹ I pray that this will help the Christian

faithful to grow in their understanding of and appreciation for the Eucharist. Of course, we would not have the Eucharist without priests to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and consecrate the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ. It is for this reason that we are especially grateful for the ministry of priests. We pray for young men to continue to follow in their footsteps, so that people will always have access to the Holy Eucharist, the sacred food for our journey to eternal life.

St. Augustine said the following about our final journey to eternal life:

We shall have no enemies in heaven, we shall never lose a friend. God's praises are sung both there and here, but here they are sung by those destined to die, there, by those destined to live forever; here they are sung in hope, there, in hope's fulfillment; here they are sung by wayfarers, there, by those living in their own country.

So, then, my brothers, let us sing now, not in order to enjoy a life of leisure, but in order to lighten our labors. You should sing as wayfarers do – sing, but continue your journey. Do not be lazy, but sing to make your journey more enjoyable. Sing, but keep going. What do I mean by keep going? Keep on making progress. This progress, however, must be in virtue; for there are some, the Apostle warns, whose only progress is in vice.

If you make progress, you will be continuing your journey, but be sure that your progress is in virtue, true faith and right living. Sing then, but keep going.²

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ [The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church.pdf \(uscbb.org\)](#), November 2021.

² St. Augustine, *Sermo* 256, 1. 3. 4; PL 38, 1191-1193; from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Office of Readings, Saturday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time.