

Homily for the 1st Sunday of Advent,
December 2, 2018
By Fr. Christian Bui

This first Sunday of Advent reminds that Christmas is just around the corner. We all have our hopes and aspirations for Christmas. These four weeks of Advent are our annual season of waiting in hope for Christ. This season of Advent waiting reminds us that everything is not quite right with our world. Our world is somewhat broken and needs fixing. The world is broken because it does not pay attention to Christ or put Jesus first. The only way to fix our broken world is to mend and repair it with Christ. Christ is the solution to our broken world.

Today we begin our preparation for celebrating the birth of Christ, our Savior, at Christmas. Our Scripture readings urge us to make ourselves ready, to be on the alert, to turn aside from distractions and give more time to God in our lives.” Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord,” says Isaiah. We must not live lives of darkness and of sin, says St Paul, but “put on the armor of grace,” and walk in the light, guided by the Holy Spirit.” Be vigilant, stay awake,” says the gospel,

I love the traditions of this time of year – lights, special music and more. Gift giving is a beautiful expression of our love and concern for others. But the greatest gift we need to prepare for is the coming of

Christ in time and at the end of time out of love for the salvation of souls, our own and others. Take time these busy days to reflect a moment on the truth that for Joseph and Mary preparing for the first Christmas meant a rough pilgrimage to Bethlehem and lodging in a stable in order to do the Father's will.

In Advent each of us has the opportunity to go on pilgrimage in anticipation of remembering Christ's birth and in anticipation of when he comes again. That day Jesus talked about in Luke's gospel is not the celebration of his birthday, all his manifestations on our Advent pilgrimage we need to watch, we need to pray, and we need to grow in holiness.

To watch means to take the time to look around us and at ourselves and see what is really going on. Are we running at another's pace or our own? Do we notice God's presence in our lives, or do we relegate him to a task? Do we see each day as a gift to be used well or a block of time to be scheduled? Do we see others as fellow members of God's family or an obstacle to or vehicle for getting what we want? We need to watch for what is directing our lives every day and make amends if necessary.

To be prepared for the coming of Christ we also need to pray. Special prayers for the season such as lighting candles on the advent wreath are helpful because they focus us on the spiritual dimension of whose we are. We can pray less formally as well. Prayer is referencing

our lives and world back to God, lifting our hearts beyond the pressures to the One before whom we will stand.

A little boy said his night prayer. He thanked God for his mommy and daddy, his grandparents and then stopped. "What about your brothers and sisters," his mother asked him, knowing that he had been fighting with them all day. He shook his head and said, "I don't do kids." Can we pray for our brothers and sisters especially the ones that are the hardest to love?

Advent offers us the opportunity especially through confession to once again experience the healing touch of Christ and once renewed experience the hope that comes in Christ. We need to pray for forgiveness and for forgiving hearts. Christ's mercy is always there for those who honestly own up. It is freeing and hope giving.

To prepare for the coming of Christ we need to grow in holiness, which means to strive to better live virtuous lives. Recall the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance; how well do we exercise them each day. Recall the theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. How well we exercise them is often reflected in little ways. How patiently do we wait in line, take the time to listen to someone at home who needs to talk, share our blessings with those in need, radiate joy in the midst of confusion, resist the inevitable temptations our human weakness brings forth, and in a hostile culture how often and well do we

defend the Church and Christ's teaching. In short, how well do we keep Christ in Christmas?

The story is told of two families who were arguing vehemently over some land they both claimed. They asked a rabbi to settle their dispute. One said that though they had never used it, they had received the land as an inheritance. They had the legal papers to prove it. The other family described how they had lived on and worked the land for years. They didn't have documents but their calluses and sore backs, the harvest, and produce of the land proved it. The rabbi studied them. Then he knelt down and put his ear to the ground. Finally, he stood up, looked at both families and said, "I had to listen to both of you and I had to listen to the land. The land has spoken. Neither of you owns the land you stand on. It is the land that owns you." Who or what owns us? How we deal with the pressures and what we set as our priorities at Christmas time can tell the story. We need to grow in holiness to allow the light of Christ to guide us.

St. Paul wished the church in Thessalonica in our 2nd reading this comforting and thought-provoking resolution: "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 our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus."

This can be a special Christmas, if we, during our Advent pilgrimage these next few weeks watch, pray, and grow in holiness. Come Lord Jesus.

Advent is a time when we expect mercy and liberation because our Lord, the King of the universe whose solemnity we celebrated last Sunday comes with power to reign over his people. This Advent is special because it marks the beginning of a special year dedicated to the family.

How do we begin this preparation? Paul gives us a clue in our second reading when he says: *“May he so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God...when our Lord Jesus comes with all his saints.”*

Holiness of life in our world today appears to have lost its meaning or perhaps is one concept that sounds so abstract or even relative. In other words, it is believed by many, even Christians, to be unattainable. Yet, it is a necessary condition for seeing and meeting the Lord when he comes because, *“without holiness no man can see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14).

In spite of the difficulties we face in attaining holiness, this season Paul admonishes us to *“conduct ourselves in the ways that please God.”* This is a call to strive for perfection. If it were not possible, Christ would not have demanded it from us.

Today’s gospel reminds us of something very important in our Christian journey. It calls us to be awake and watchful. Therefore, this is

a call for us to intensify and strengthen our prayer life. This is because prayer purifies the soul and casts away all fears. It prepares and strengthens us in joyful hope.

Importantly, prayer provides us the spiritual energy, courage and confidence to stand firm. Therefore, as a family, this Advent offers us the opportunity to unite in prayer as we wait for the Lord. So, rather than engage ourselves only with mundane preparations, let us engage ourselves in intensive prayer. We must prepare together as a family through prayer.

May our Lord find us awake and ready when he comes in glory. So, with the psalmist let us proclaim: *“To you, O Lord I lift up my soul.”*