

The First Sunday of Advent

November 27, 2016

The beginning of the new liturgical year finds many of our hearts and minds filled with all kinds of worries and concerns. Some real. Some not so much. Add to that our cell phones, tablets, and other electronic gadgets continuously filling our minds with tons of information that may or may not be helpful, we often find ourselves paying little attention to the voice of God.

In short, God seems so remote for so many of us because we are simply too busy.

But by being here at Mass this morning, we have an opportunity to slow down and to give our attention to God through the voice of the prophet Isaiah. In our first reading we heard God calling us to climb to the top of the mountain to look for the Lord's advent, the Lord's coming into our lives.

He's calling us to rise above the mountains of our daily worries, problems and anxieties in order to re-examine our lives with all of their peaks and valleys. As Christians we can only do that through the vision of Christ who is the Light of the World and God's greatest gift.

The problem you and I face comes not from the fact that we're habitually unconcerned or apathetic or lazy. In fact, we tend to have the opposite problem. We're far too concerned about all of the things that divert us from being aware of God's presence. We're caught up in all of the events of our days that we are blind to the condition of our souls. In biblical language this spiritual blindness is spoken of as darkness.

We know that Advent is a season in which we prepare for the Lord's coming into our lives. Perhaps we should also see it as a season for increasing the awareness of our spiritual health, because the truth is we need to recognize God already at work in our lives each and every day as well as looking forward to the day when He will return.

God's always offering Himself to us - we're just not always responding. Advent then becomes a time to conscientiously and deliberately respond to His offer. We might resolve today to begin each day of Advent by giving God some of the early moments of our day for reflection and awareness of His presence along with a commitment to accomplishing His will in our lives. Then we should pause at other moments throughout the day to recommit to that goal.

The image of the mountain in today's first reading has always been a significant biblical device for being watchful and ready. God is constantly calling us to climb to the top of the mountain, to look for His coming as well as taking a look over the broad range of our own lives.

But too often, our lives become cluttered with too many things demanding our attention, draining us of our energies, and blinding us to the big picture. Money only goes so far. Technology can only do so much. Medicines have a short shelf life. All of our human resources that we think are necessary are limited. Only God has what we need... and He has it in a limitless supply.

Can we look ahead? Yes, we can... if we take the time and make the space to do so. Can we listen each day to God's message in our lives? Of course we can. Can we seize the opportunity to read from the bible? Spend extra time in thoughtful reflection

and quiet prayer? Of course we can. But that's not the issue. The big question is not what we **can** do – it's what **will** we do. Because, after all, it's our will that controls what we do or don't do, not our abilities or our good intentions.

We live in an age filled with fear and uncertainty. We should, if we don't already, ask ourselves the question: "Where is God in all of this?" Advent offers us a great opportunity to discover answers to that question. Genuine questions aren't denials – they're missions. And God always wants to be sought.

The Greek philosopher Plato once said: "The life which is unexamined is not worth living." Every Advent, and indeed every time we come here to Mass, Holy Mother Church asks us to examine our lives.

Today we enter into and begin our journey through Advent, hopefully looking for the coming of the Lord into our lives. And so we listen once more to the words of Jesus proclaimed in today's gospel:

"So, too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

To put the message of this first week of Advent as plainly as possible, are we prepared to meet the Lord both now and in the future?