

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT – A (2010)

I hope you all had a great Thanksgiving and enjoyed time to be with family. And today I want to wish you a happy new year—a new Church year, that is. Today we begin the new liturgical year on this first Sunday of Advent, a season that is all about preparation. Yes, we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas, but Advent—especially the first half of this season—is also about preparing ourselves to meet the Lord Jesus when he comes to call us to himself.

Before speaking a bit more about this and what our Scripture readings have to say about it, I want to let you know a few of the details about how we will observe this season and prepare for Christmas here at St. Edward; you might call this a few extended announcements:

1. You will notice we have our Adopt-a-Family trees set up once again in the front and back of the Church; you are invited to pick a tag from the tree, purchase and wrap the item and return to the tree by Dec. 12 (see the bulletin for more details).

2. Advent is a time we give special attention to our need to turn back to God, especially through the sacrament of reconciliation. The insert in last week's bulletin gave the extra times I am available for confession during this season (including Saturday afternoons 3:30 – 5 p.m.); communal penance services and other extra times will be listed in upcoming bulletins. If it has been a while since you have gone to confession or you aren't sure what to confess, I invite you to pick up a copy of this "Guide for Individual Reconciliation" [show] which can be found in the pamphlet racks at the church entrances—it does a great job in going through confession step by step and in providing a series of questions to help examine your conscience so you have a better idea of what to confess. We had our 2nd graders make their first confessions a couple of weeks ago; it was a great celebration of God's mercy for them and also for the many parents who went to confession as well. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of the many opportunities for this sacrament during this holy season.

3. Don't forget our Advent Lessons and Carols program on Sunday, Dec. 12, at 2 p.m. here in the Church. We are especially honored to have Archbishop Hanus who will take part in our program this year. If you haven't heard him sing before at Mass or elsewhere, you are in for a treat—he has a beautiful singing voice!

4. As usual, we are asking for volunteers to help with all the liturgical ministries for our Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day—Eucharistic ministers, lectors, greeters and altar servers. Those sign-up sheets are in the main entrance of the church; I thank you in advance for signing up.

5. Speaking of Christmas, that falls on Saturday this year. As you know, we normally have Mass on Saturday at 5:15 p.m. to satisfy the Sunday obligation. However, **there will be no 5:15 p.m. Mass this year on Saturday, Dec. 25.** There are two reasons for this. First, I will have five Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, and then the usual three Masses on Sunday, Dec. 26 (feast of the Holy Family). I think it important to give our musicians and other liturgical ministers at least a bit of a break that Saturday afternoon and evening; frankly, I will need one by that time as well! In addition, the Office of Worship in Dubuque has reminded us that any Masses offered Saturday evening on Dec. 25 would be the Christmas Mass and not that of the Holy Family of Sunday morning—thus, it would not satisfy the Sunday obligation for Sun., Dec. 26 (the note to the contrary in last week's Advent insert was incorrect). All this will be restated in upcoming parish bulletins, so don't worry now about remembering all these details; I just wanted to give you some advance notice.

Let's return to our readings for this first Sunday of Advent; they certainly do remind us of the seriousness and indeed the solemnity of the call to prepare ourselves. Jesus affirms as clearly as possible that he will come again at the end of time, a belief we affirm in our profession of faith which we will make again in a few moments: "He [Jesus] will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end." Jesus will indeed come again, but we do not know when—he was just as clear about that. Some claim to know when that will occur—this in spite of the fact that all such predictions in the

past have proven false. Still, Jesus puts it to us directly: “you do not know on which day your Lord will come...for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

Are we truly mindful of the fact that Jesus will come again? I don't mean that we should live in abject, paralyzing fear; nor do I suggest that we should abandon everything and everyone and go live on a mountain or in a desert somewhere. In fact, I think it is the opposite temptation to which we are more prone: to get so caught up in our frantic activities and overloaded schedules that we do not give ourselves time to nurture our relationship with God, let alone to be mindful of the fact that his Son will come back for us and for the Last Judgment at an unknown time. Jesus' second coming might not happen for thousands of years; on the other hand, it might be tomorrow...or even later today. “You do not know on which day your Lord will come.”

And if Jesus' second coming does not take place during our lives on this earth, he most assuredly will come at the end of each of our own individual lives—at the moment of our death—at which point we will each undergo our particular judgment, the declaration of our eternal destiny. I spoke three weeks ago about death and our attitudes about it and how we have nothing to fear from death if we have prepared ourselves.

So...have we? Are we preparing ourselves for that certain event? That is why God gives us this life and our time here: to prepare ourselves through prayer, repentance and conversion, and the discipline of discipleship; to be ready and actually look forward to Jesus' coming to welcome us into eternity. Advent is the graced season that highlights and underlines that fundamental task. St. Paul urges us to ready ourselves by rejecting the works of darkness—the orgies, drunkenness, promiscuity and lusts, the rivalries and jealousies—all those things that lead only the emptiness of selfishness and self-gratification that in fact will never fully satisfy us anyway. Instead, we are to put on “the armor of light...the Lord Jesus Christ”. Jesus is indeed that flickering candle, that “light [that] will clear the shades of death and sin” that our opening song for this Advent season speaks about. Amid all the other preparations for this season and for Christmas that we engage in, don't forget the most important preparation of all: preparing your heart, mind and soul to welcome Jesus ever more intimately and ever more lovingly into your life. That is what Advent is truly all about.