



Homily – First Sunday of Advent 2011 (B)ⁱ

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Happy Advent!

I hope you all had a beautiful Thanksgiving this week. Today we begin counting down the days until the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ! I am praying that this will be a season of joy and renewal for you and for all your families and loved ones.

Today is a new beginning for all of us in the Church, as we have started using the new translation of our prayers for the Holy Mass. I think we can already hear the difference. There is new “feel” in the language of our prayers, and there is a new depth and a new richness to our worship.

So this Advent is a time of special grace for all of us, as we have this chance to worship with renewed reverence, beauty and joy.

Advent, as we all know, is a word that means “coming.” For us it means the coming of God into our world and into our lives. It is a time for us to increase our desire for Christ to be with us. It is a time to increase our desire to know and imitate the divine life he revealed to us.

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah prays a beautiful prayer about waiting for God. He asks our heavenly Father to once more turn his face to his children, to come down from heaven and to enter into our lives. We hear the prophet’s words:

*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down ...
Would that you might meet us doing right,
that we were mindful of you in our ways!*

My brothers and sisters, we are called in Advent to live with waiting hearts, in the spirit of Isaiah.

Our God is always coming to us. God knows that sometimes we sin, that sometimes we fall through our own faults and human weakness. He knows that sometimes we may stray from the path of his ways.

But in his great love for us, Jesus Christ is always coming to us, again and again knocking at the door of our hearts.ⁱⁱ He is always inviting us to conversion, always promising us his pardon and his mercy.

He calls to us in a special way during the Advent season.

Advent is a good time to make a more serious examination of conscience and a good confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament of his love and mercy.

We need to ask God during this holy season, for the grace to know ourselves better. We need to ask him to show us what we need to work on to improve in our spiritual lives. Advent is the moment to take note of the things that separate us from God, to loosen their hold on us, and to cast them away from us.

The good news is that God wants to help us! He wants to give us the grace we need to open our hearts to do his will, to do what is right, to live according to his teachings and ways.

That is what St. Paul is talking about in the second reading of today's Mass.

St. Paul promises us today: "You are not lacking in *any spiritual gift* as you wait for ... our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end. ... God is faithful."

What security and confidence we should have, my brothers and sisters!

God our Father loves us so much! He keeps us alive and nourishes us with his grace! He gives us every spiritual gift we need through the sacraments of his Church, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

So we need to stay awake and be watchful! We need to be prepared to receive his spiritual gifts! We need to work with the graces he gives us as we await for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the lesson of our Gospel reading for today.

Jesus tells us this parable: "It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, *each with his own work*, and orders the gatekeeper to be on watch."

This is a parable about our Christian lives.

Jesus is the Lord of the house, which is his Catholic Church. The gatekeeper is the Pope and the bishops he has entrusted to watch over his Church.ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus has left on a journey — rising from the dead and ascending into heaven; we know he is coming back, but we don't know the day or the hour. And we are the servants that Jesus has placed in charge.

This is the beautiful duty of our Christian lives, my brothers and sisters. He has given each of us some work to do, some personal responsibility for the mission of his Church.

Our work is to continue Jesus' work. We are called to be instruments in his loving plan for the world. Each of us has the duty of sharing his Gospel, uniting our neighbors to his Catholic Church, and extending his Kingdom of love and truth to every heart.

To carry out our Christian vocation, we need the grace of God so that we can imitate and follow the example of Jesus Christ. We need to take heed and be watchful and observe all the ways of the life of Jesus. We need to have the deep desire to conform our hearts and minds and wills to the image of Jesus Christ.

In today's first reading, we heard the prophet Isaiah tell us that we are created to be clay in the hands of our loving Father.

My brothers and sisters, this gets us to the deeper meaning of our Advent preparations.

This is why Jesus Christ comes down from heaven to share our humanity. He comes to show us the true image of what our human lives mean. In Jesus, we see who we are meant to be.

God wants to shape each one of us into the image of his Son, so that we become his own beloved sons and daughters.^{iv}

So this is the challenge for us during this holy season of Advent, my brothers and sisters. We need to ask for the grace to be like clay in God's hands. To give up our own will in order to do his will. To receive all the spiritual gifts that he gives us in his Church and to allow him to shape us into the person that he wants us to be.

So let us ask our Mother Mary to help us to use this time of Advent to really prepare our hearts for the coming of her Son, so that we might truly follow in his footsteps and live the life that he has modeled for us.

ⁱ Readings: Isa. 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7; Ps. 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19; 1 Cor. 1:3–9; Mark 13:33–37.

ⁱⁱ Rev. 3:20.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eph. 2:19; St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 9; *Catena Aurea*, 2:13, 32–37.

^{iv} Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49.