

Today, marked by the lighting of our Advent Wreath, the church starts a new liturgical year with the season of Advent. The season of Advent serves us in two ways. First, it is a penitential season which calls us to reflect on our lives in preparation for the second coming of Christ at the end of this age. And second, it is a season to prepare us for the joyful celebration of the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

The Advent Wreath reminds us of the long time people lived in spiritual darkness, waiting for the coming of the Messiah; the "Light of the World". Each year in Advent, people wait once again in darkness for the coming of Christ, his historical coming in the manger in Bethlehem, his final coming at the end of this age, and his special coming in every moment of grace in our lives.



The wreath is constructed with evergreen branches in the shape of a circle as a symbol of our eternal everlasting life. Four candles are inserted into the wreath, one for each week of advent. Three of the candles are violet, and one is rose coloured, which is used to mark the third week of advent; a week marked with rejoicing as we approach Christmas.

The candles symbolize Christ who will come into the world at Christmas. Each week we light an additional candle and the light of Christ increases, until at Christmas we have the fullness of his light. A light that will dispel all darkness. A light that will dispel the darkness of sin with forgiveness and mercy; a light that will dispel the darkness of loneliness, grief and sorrow with the gifts and consolation of the Holy Spirit; and a light that will dispel the darkness of sickness, injury and death with the promise of everlasting life.

In our gospel today, Jesus tells us about his second coming and that: "Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with a particular task, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

Therefore, keep awake for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. Keep awake." We are warned to be alert at all times and to pray, that we will always be found in a state of grace and favour with our God.

In this season of Advent we are called to reflect on how we are living the gospel message of Jesus Christ. We are called to repentance and conversion. We are called to be prepared to meet Christ face to face, as if today was the last day of our earthly life.

We hear in the gospel today, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight' ... 'the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.' I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

How do we understand the mystery of being "baptized in the Spirit"? In the gospels, Jesus teaches us in detail about such mysteries and on the feast of Pentecost instituted his church, so that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we may have his church as a source of ongoing teaching. To believe in the gospel message is to believe in the teachings of our Holy Catholic Church. A church which through apostolic succession, has Pope Francis, as the visible head of the Church here on earth.

To know the teachings of Christ and his Church we need to study our catechism. Every home should have a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It should be read, studied, and raise discussions in the family. You can not develop a sound moral conscious, you can not learn right from wrong, you cannot make decisions on birth control or about life and death, without a strong grounding in the teachings of Jesus Christ through his Church.

The newspaper, popular magazines, lunch room chatter and television are no substitute as sources of information for you to develop your knowledge and faith in the gospel message.

Jesus summarizes how we are to live this gospel message in the golden rule. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

We all strive for goodness. We want good jobs, good homes, good children and every good thing that goes with them. Our desire for goodness can become disoriented and distorted by this world. Our inborn desire for goodness is a desire to return the love which we have received to the one from whom we have received it, who is God. Jesus calls us to respond to that desire and love our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Jesus calls us also to love our neighbour as ourselves. That means making sure that everyone has a clean, dry, warm and safe home. That everyone has a good education, adequate medical, and dental care. That everyone has enough food to feed their families. Everyone has the means to earn a living. Everyone has a place to worship God and be taught his truths.

We know that not everyone has these things. In fact we know that two thirds of the world do not have these things. Two thirds of the world live in comparative darkness deprived from the basic goods of the world. A darkness that they wait to be lifted by the light of Christ coming into the world.

We are the mystical body of Christ with his real presence dwelling in us in the Holy Spirit. In a very real sense we become the light of Christ and share in his mission to bring his light to the world. It is Christ living and working through us that will feed the hungry, cure the sick, and give sight to the blind. We must grow in grace and in holiness, through the power of the Holy Spirit, so that this light will flood the entire world granting it peace and healing. While we wait for this growth, we remain in sin and darkness.

Today we light a candle, a small dim light against a world that often seems forbidding and dark. But we light it because we are a people of hope, a people whose faith is marked by an expectation. An expectation of Christ coming fully in our midst dispelling all darkness.