

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT DECEMBER 1, 2019

Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come (Matthew 24:42).

Dear brothers and sisters, Advent, “the great liturgical season of vigilance, waiting and watching”¹ is here. Today is the first Sunday and the first day of the Advent this year of grace.

What is required of us as we begin this period of expectation and waiting for the Lord? God wants us to understand what is at stake as much as is possible; the coming of the Lord. Through the Prophet Jeremiah, God puts this matter on the table in all its grandeur, "The days are coming -oracle of the LORD- when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days, at that time, I will make a just shoot spring up for David. He shall do what is right and just in the land"(Jeremiah 33: 14-15). In other words, the promised Messiah from the lineage of David is coming. The first reading spoke of this with singular poetic beauty and majesty.

¹ Robert Barron, Advent Gospel Reflections, Word of Fire Catholic Ministries, Washington: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2001, p.7.

"In days to come, the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it"(Isaiah 2:1-5). The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain, because the Messiah, the expected One of whom all the prophets spoke about would be born there. This prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Christ, the Son of Mary and the Son God! Did the nations stream to Him, wanting to know Him and to walk in his paths? Yes, this was fulfilled, first in the visit of the Maggi, who were the representatives of all nations, who came to see the newborn baby Jesus. They said, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage" (Matthew 2:2). Second, the prophecy was fulfilled in the countless pilgrims who travel to Holy Land in order to see with their eyes the land, where the Savior of the world was born. It is fulfilled when we come to the Holy Eucharist to worship him and listen to his Word. It is fulfilled each time someone, through the action of the Holy Spirit, converts and embraces the fulness of faith via studies and research.

We cannot, therefore, say that the coming of the Savior happened in the past and not it is over. St Cyril of Jerusalem, reflecting on this spoke about the twofold coming of our Lord. He wrote, "The first coming was marked by patience: the second will bring the crown of a divine kingdom (St Cyril of Jerusalem, On the twofold coming of Christ, Catechetical Instruction). Explaining this further, St Cyril noted,

At the first coming Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. At his second coming he will be clothed in light as in a garment. In the first coming he endured the cross, despising the shame; in the second coming he will be in glory, escorted by an army of angels. We look then beyond the first coming and await the second (Ibid.)

The first coming is what we celebrate on Christmas Day and the second coming will be at an unknown hour. The season of advent calls for vigilance. Through the Prophet Malachi, God spoke about this, "Look, the Lord almighty will come, and who will endure the day of his entry, or who will stand in his sight? Because he comes like a refiner's fire, a fuller's

herb, and he will sit refining and cleansing" (Malachi 3:2-3).

St Bernard spoke also of a third coming that happens between the First and the Second. "This middle coming is like a road that leads from the first coming to the last. At the first, Christ was our redemption; at the last, he will become manifest as our life; but in this middle way he is our rest and our consolation" (St Bernard, Advent Homily). The Mellifluous doctor of the Church based this insight regarding the middle coming of the Lord on the words of the Lord himself, when he said, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him (John 14:23). Our Lord comes to us in this mode in the poor, when we read or listen to the Word of God and the sacraments especially His real presence in the holy Eucharist.

Being aware that there are two other comings of the Lord besides the first, it behooves us to be vigilant. We must stay awake and not be like the people of Noah's time. During the days of Noah "the earth was corrupt in the view of God, full of lawlessness" (Genesis 6:11). Nevertheless, people of that time

carried on their regular pursuits as if they had eternity on earth. Things go wrong when believers are not watchful. Our Lord commands us, “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap”(Luke 23:34-35). In our families, if the parents do not keep their eyes open, the children will get themselves into self-destructive things. For instance, they could indulge in watching pornography and x-rated movies. The children or grandchildren might not do their homework or go to bed when they should. As a child, I waited for when my father was not looking then threw away the yam that did not taste good. When he noticed what I did, he made me go to pick it up from the dirt and put it back into my mouth. After that lesson, I did not throw away food again.

How can we keep vigilant? It is not about not going to bed when we need to sleep but a different kind of vigilance summed up in the following words from the Prophet Isaiah.

Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do

good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool (Isaiah 1:17-18).

This is why is a holy and laudable thing to go to Confession always and especially during the Advent and to occupy ourselves with works of charity and mercy.

One other practical thing we can do during this season is to spend thirty minutes or one hour in silent adoration of the Lord hidden in the Holy Eucharist. Use that opportunity to tell him about those things you worry about or the problems you have been trying to solve without much success. Surrender them to Him. This is not being drowsy or lethargic but being aware of his presence. Who more than Virgin Mother Mary, the Mother of Christ can teach us how to be ready for the coming of her Son? Dear Mother of the Word Incarnate pray for us that we may follow your example of letting the Word of God take flesh in us. O Mary our Mother, pray for us that we may await

the coming our Lord with love beyond all telling like
you.