

[Readings: Jer 33:14-16; Psalm 25; 1 Thess 3:12-4:2; Luke: 21:25-28, 34-36]

That was a cheery Gospel, wasn't it?

The season of Advent which we begin today, celebrates the three arrivals ("Adventus" means arrival or coming) of Jesus Christ. His first arrival to us was in human history. He also comes to us now in the mystery of our sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. His arrival in divine majesty and glory at the end of time is what we focus on for the first part of our Advent journey.

Our waiting for the festival of Christmas deepens our preparation for Christ's return in glory. But Advent is also a time of God's waiting. God is waiting for us -- to prepare our hearts, to prepare our minds, to prepare our lives, to prepare our homes for the arrival of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, in the Eucharist of Christmas and at the end of time.

Jesus tells us what to do in today's Gospel: "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life" (Luke 21:34). More teens and young adults are indulging in alcohol, drug abuse and sexual immorality. The age of alcohol, drug and sex abuse is now junior high or even earlier. One third of all live births in our country are to unwed mothers. Socially transmitted diseases are at an all-time high among younger people. But there is a growing "holy remnant" of young people rising up with a new spiritual hunger and a spiritual revival. Some of them are in this parish.

Adults don't get away without guilt or shame. Hundreds of thousands of adults are turning to gambling, compulsive shopping and Internet pornography to fill the emotional holes in their hearts to the point of turning these vices into billion dollar industries. There is more mental illness in our country than in any other country or at any time in our nation's history. And I am speaking about the lack of self-worth, the lack of self-esteem, the lack of self-respect, the anxiety of spreading ourselves too thin, and the pressures that society and our culture puts on us to pull us away from God, from religion, and from our moral and ethical centers. These are the ways of thinking, speaking and acting that weaken our spiritual house from within and make us a less worthy temple for the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul tells us in our Second Reading how to combat this downward spiral of self-destruction and anxiety. As we increase and abound in genuine love and respect for ourselves and for one another and for all, we grow stronger in our life of discipleship. This is the “home improvement” that God rejoices in and brings to completion, in God’s time and in God’s way, for each of us and for the Church as a whole. Does your life and work “abound in love” for others?

What impact does the coming of the Lord have on your daily life? What distracts you from being prepared for his coming? How can you keep these distractions from getting in the way of encountering God?

Waiting is never a passive enterprise. It always involves commitment on our part. For those of you who are parents, do you remember the last month of your pregnancy before your son or daughter was born? What was that last month like for you and your spouse? You were “Preparing the Way!”

Last-minute preparations for a new arrival. Baby clothes, a crib, a changing table, baby formula and baby food. A new space for the baby to sleep and to play. Teaching older siblings how to welcome the New Arrival.

Would any of us call the pizza man for a delivery and then fail to be home when the pie arrives? Would we invite a guest to dinner and then be surprised -- and unprepared -- when they show up? Would we place an order from a catalogue or through the internet and then protest when the credit card comes due? When we say we are waiting for something, we can’t live as if we are waiting for nothing. Our waiting is a dedication. Our Advent waiting dedicates us to the Christ Who is eternally on the way.

My friends, our personal “end time” will come when death claims our own mortal bodies. The visions of today’s Gospel could easily describe our own death. The sun and the stars will be darkened by our own closing eyelids. The world we live in will slip away as we lose the use of our bodily functions.

The chaos and despair of this world may cause us to faint from fear. As people of faith, we remember that what the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Master calls a butterfly. Our salvation indeed is near. Come, Lord Jesus!