

Homily of First Sunday of Advent, Year A, 2025

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122:1-9; Roman 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

This Sunday marks the beginning of the Advent season and the beginning of the readings of Circle A of a new liturgical year (Year A).

Prior to Vatican II, the Catholic Church followed a single and a yearly cycle of readings that are repeated every year. The Sunday readings were read through the week. Weekday Masses did not have their own readings. For this reason, many passages and books of the Bible were left out and not read at Mass. Following the reforms of Vatican II (1962 to 1965), the Catholic liturgical year and the lectionary for Sundays and weekdays were divided into a three-year cycle (A, B, and C), in order to include almost all the books of the Bible over the course of a three-year period. This began in 1970.

Advent season is observed as a time of special preparation to mark the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a penitential, soul-searching, and spiritual reawakening journey to renew us to welcome the “Word Made Flesh.” The word “Advent” comes from the Latin word “adventus,” which means “coming.”

Many churches are decorated with Advent wreath from this first Sunday of Advent. In ancient cultures, wreaths symbolized victory, honor, and achievement, particularly in Greece and Rome. Athletes and soldiers were crowned with wreaths as awards. However, the use of Advent wreath to decorate churches is said to have begun among the Lutherans in Germany in the 16th century, from where it spread to other Christian Faiths and Denominations.

Advent wreath further explains the meaning of Advent season:

The green wreath in circle shape symbolizes God’s eternity and everlasting life (Psalm 90:2). The candle light symbolizes Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12). The four candles symbolize the four weeks of Advent. The first purple candle is called the Candle of Hope. “In his name, the nations will put their hope” (Matthew 12:21). The second purple candle is called the Candle of Peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). “He is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14). The third candle, pink in color, is called the Candle of Joy. “Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10). The third purple candle, which is the fourth candle, is called Candle of Love. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him may not perish, but have life eternal” (John 3:16).

The array of purple color of Advent season reminds us that the season is a penitential and a sobering journey. Also, Advent purple color foreshadows the sovereignty and the royalty of Christ. Purple was a royal color.

We are glad that Christmas excitement is felt everywhere. However, we must not allow ourselves be drawn into the world’s commercialization of Christmas. For us Catholics, spiritual preparation

is more important so that there will be an inn for Jesus in our lives this Christmas. Spiritual preparation makes every Christmas become the first Christmas.

In the first reading, Isaiah invites us to a soul-searching Advent journey: "Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths.... Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." The prophet tells us the transformation which those who make this journey faithfully receive: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again." This means that those who "walk in the light of the Lord" are transformed from weapons of crises, division, and hate to instruments of reconciliation, peace, and harmony.

The Advent journey, not only prepares us for spiritual renewal, it also prepares us for Jesus' coming to take us to our eternal home. In the gospel, Jesus invites us, "Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. ... you must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

In the second reading St. Paul tells us that Advent season is a time "to awake from sleep," "throw off works of darkness, and put on the armor of light." It is a time to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh." St. Paul mentions some of the desires (sins) of the flesh: "orgies and drunkenness," "promiscuity and lust," "rivalry and jealousy."

To conclude, during Advent season, we are encouraged to undertake works of charity which can bring hope, peace, joy, and love to the life of others. John the Baptist says, "Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise" (Luke 3:10-11).

Some spiritual recipe for a good Advent season:

- Participate in parish Advent season spiritual exercises such as retreat, prayer, Penitential Service, Confession and so on.
- Make Advent season spiritual resolutions to be closer to God.
- Attend weekday Mass in addition to Sunday Mass.
- Make peace with estranged relationships.
- Do works of charity.
- Be devoted to the Word of God and to prayer.

We wish one another a fruitful and Spirit-filled Advent season.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP