

Homily: 1st Sunday of Advent: Cycle A: 2016: Is 2:1-5; Ps. 122; Rom 13: 11-14; Mt 19:24; 37-44

“What will be your gift to Jesus this Advent/Christmas Season?”

1. Today we are beginning a new liturgical year –it is also a possible call for a new beginning with the Lord for each of us. **Advent is a season of great spiritual opportunity** – a call to wait upon the Lord in humility, in love, in holy silence, in hopeful expectation. We as a Church are calling to mind both His first coming as the God-man who became a little child and was born on Christmas day to show us the way back to our Heavenly homeland and save us from our sins, and we are also anticipating Jesus’s Second Coming in glory - when He will judge the human race and establish a new heavens and a new earth.
2. **Are we ready for His coming?** The readings today should lead us to reflect upon that most important question in our hearts and minds. St. Paul in the 2nd reading today challenges us to cast off the works of darkness, of the flesh, and instead to embrace the works of light, of God. *To turn away from rivalry and jealousy, from drunkenness and lust and promiscuity, and instead to be kind and sober, pure and faithful, and diligent in loving God and neighbor.* This is why Advent is a time when all Catholics are encouraged to make a good Confession of their sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in humble honesty. Take advantage of the Advent Penance Services - ours at St. Thomas will be next Sunday December 4 at 4 pm - at the various parishes where a number of priests will be hearing Confessions, and please pray for us priests- since hearing Confessions is not always an easy task. Making a good Advent Confession is a prime spiritual way to get ready to see the Lord. Jesus is forewarning us in the Gospel today, by telling us not to wait until it is too late, *for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.* This will either be His Second Coming in glory, or when we take our last breath on earth, if it is before the Second Coming of the Lord.
3. **But are we distracted?** We live in a noisy, disorienting culture - a time of information overload. The people of Noah’s time were also distracted as Jesus points out in the Gospel today. They were focused on the here and now, instead of

on the Lord; they were *eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, working, etc. etc.* I want to issue this challenge to all of us: **can we slow down this Advent and allow the Lord to draw us close to His Heart and His holy will for our lives on earth?** Please take extra some time and gain some time by pulling back from all *the text messages, the phone calls, the internet, the shopping, and the parties to pray and reflect more, and interact with others face to face* (see dinner story of Fr. Patti and me and the young people at the next table playing video games and texting instead of talking to the other family members at the table). Here are a few recommendations of helpful Advent spiritual practices- (check parish website): **1.** *Make a good Confession of your sins (and look up some good Catholic examinations of conscience on the internet to help with this).* **2.** *Take some time to read the Infancy narratives in the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 1 and 2) and the Gospel of Luke (chapter 1 and chapter 2 verses 1-40).* **3.** *Try to come to daily Mass or at least one extra day a week if your work schedule allows it.* **4.** *Say the daily Rosary and Divine Mercy chaplet, preferably with your family if possible.* **5.** *Do some good Advent practices with your family and children (again there are some helpful resources on Catholic websites on the internet).* **6.** *Give more money to charity and reach out to people who are lonely or who you have not talked to or interacted with in a long time, be they family members, co-workers or neighbors.* **7.** *Visit a local nursing home.* **8.** *Come to our Divine Mercy Eucharistic Holy Hour from 3-4 each Friday, the Hour of Mercy.* **9.** *Invite a lapsed Catholic you know back to the Mass and the practice of his or her faith.* **10.** *Just try to slow down and enjoy the Holy Silence of this Season.* **11.** *Avoid the materialistic rat-race of this season in our society and instead when giving gifts really give things that will help people or make a donation to the needy in their name.* There are obviously many more good spiritual practices to do - just ask the Holy Spirit to show you, as well as what you need to detach yourself from - so as to be more free in the Lord. I pray that God will bless each of us this Advent season and we will be open to the grace to carry out a few of these good spiritual practices, so that on Christmas day as Jesus gives Himself to us, we can give our lives to Him as a gift in return, in deeper union and love. God bless you.