

Homily for the 1st Sunday of Advent "C"
Nov. 28-29, 2009

On this weekend every year, we witness an amazing display of zeal, stamina, perseverance and drive from the American people.

Beginning in the early hours of the morning on the day after Thanksgiving, millions of Americans flock to the stores and shopping malls determined to shop as though their lives depended on it.

Retailers call it "Black Friday" - the beginning of the holiday season and one of the most important times of the fiscal year, which can often serve as a barometer for economic health. I saw news reports in the last couple of days of individuals who camped out starting at 3 a.m. so that they would be the first in line to cash-in on the amazing savings.

All over the country hundreds of shoppers were urging storeowners to open their doors just a few minutes early so that they could begin shopping. In just two days, Americans will spend nearly \$7 billion dollars.

There's nothing wrong with shopping and there's nothing wrong with wanting to save money. But, there is something very wrong when the amount of energy spent on shopping and preparing for the secular observance of Christmas far outweighs the energy and time spent preparing spiritually for Christmas. The reason Christmas exists at all is to celebrate the birth of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But you might miss the Christ part of Christmas because so many religious references to Christmas have been removed from public life. In many public school systems the 10 days of vacation surrounding December 25th is referred to as a Winter

Break. In many cities, courts have ruled that the crèche scene is not inclusive enough, and therefore should be removed from public buildings. What was once really a *holy-day* season, is now called the holiday season - a feast for consumerism, materialism and obsession with amassing goods.

Every year there are numerous rounds of Christmas parties with very little if any mention of the birth of Christ. How many people ever stop to think of the reason we have parties? Some *may go to church*, depending on how tired they are, but today, the religious celebration of Christmas is no more than an afterthought.

Our readings today point to the awesome reality of the return of Christ at the end of time. The prophet Jeremiah states that "The days are coming, says the Lord, when God will fulfill the promise He made to send us a savior, His only Son and his name shall be called "justice."

"Justice!" That is a powerful name. Justice is a virtue which means "giving another person what they are owed - what is due to them." That is what Advent is all about - preparing our hearts and our minds in such a way that we can truly give God what we owe Him - our praise, adoration and thanksgiving for all the He has done for us and all that we hope He will do for us in the coming year. It means expressing our awe at the mystery of the Word become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ - true God and true man, in the fullness of time, the fulfillment of all the prophecies.

In the Gospel today, we are given a frightening account of the End Times. The Lord tells us that in fact, "People *will die of fright* in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken." These words of our Lord

don't fit well with the snowmen, reindeer and cookies normally associated with this time of year.

The readings show us a different reality. Advent is a time for serious reflection and preparation in faith. As much as our culture tries to manipulate us into worrying about the best gift or the perfect Christmas fantasy, our true home is heaven and our true joy is communion with Jesus Christ. We should be investing our time and energy preparing ourselves for *that* real joy and *true* satisfaction. This is the preparation which will ensure that we experience a more perfect celebration of Christmas.

To help us the Gospel provides us with three instructions on how to prepare spiritually for Christmas during this Advent season.

First, our Lord tells us that in spite of the fear that will grip the world at the signs of the end times, we, as believers need not be afraid. In fact, we should stand erect and raise our heads in anticipation of our redemption. In other words, we should be looking forward to the day when our Lord returns in glory.

Second, our Lord tells us to beware that our hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life. In other words, we ask ourselves, "What will occupy our thoughts in the days and weeks to come as we prepare for Christmas?" "Will it be all those details of trying to keep up appearances?" Or, will it be our desire to take time to listen to the Lord in daily prayer and the reading of the Scriptures? Will we allow ourselves to get caught up with what our society has told us will make Christmas special or will we be caught up in attentiveness to the Lord?"

Finally, our Lord tells us to be vigilant at all times and pray that we have the strength to escape the tribulations that are

coming. How vigilant and alert will we be throughout Advent? Will we participate in the Mission that starts next weekend? Can we get to a daily Mass once or twice a week? Will we pray with our families before meals or bedtime? What will be our resolutions for 2010?

My brothers and sisters, let us actually celebrate Advent this year. The purple vestments and candles should remind us that it is a season of penance and preparation - a season of cutting back and detaching from the excess that our culture tries to convince us will make us truly happy. What will bring us happiness and real joy is preparing our hearts with a good confession; praying the rosary doing acts of charity and taking time to read the accounts of Jesus birth from Matthew and Luke's Gospels.

On Christmas we should be filled with true joy and be able to make the words of the Responsorial Psalm our own saying, "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul."