

First Sunday of Advent (Year C)

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke 21:25-36

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The Gospel of the Lord.

SERMON

Can you believe that it's already December?

It's already been a year since I planted one of Pat's poinsettia plants in our backyard and it's ready to bloom again.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent.

The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent.

The purple candles symbolize prayer and preparing.

The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday, representing

Gaudete Sunday, and priests will wear either pink or

rose colored vestments. This pink candle symbolizes

joy.

During Advent, we prepare for, and anticipate, the coming of Christ. We remember the longing of Jews for a Messiah and our own longing and need of forgiveness, salvation and a new beginning.

Even as we look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus in a humble stable in Bethlehem, we also look forward anticipating the second coming of Christ as the fulfillment of all that was promised by his first coming.

From our gospel reading today, it is difficult to imagine how joy fits in with all these dire warnings of distress and foreboding, of heaven and earth passing away.

In our world today we see country against country, state against state.

Nuclear threats, bombings, and immigrants desperate for better lives. If these are the foreboding signs of Christ's second coming he must be right around the corner.

We can't get depressed about the things happening in the world. The Gospel says to not be weighed down by all our troubles. But we are bombarded by daily news of the negative political climate, fathers killing their wives and children, people being killed because their skin is a different color or they are of a different religion, men of God abusing young children, and being on strike for 52 days because one job should be enough.

We don't know when the world will end, but each one of us had a part of our own personal world ending at one time or another. It ended when a loved one died, or someone we loved walked away from us. It ended with a diagnosis, a job loss, or financial uncertainties. It ended when our lives felt empty and without meaning.

Sometimes grief is public, such as the loss of life and home after the deadly forest fires in California, or the recent earthquake in Alaska, and here the flooding on Kauai, or the lava consuming homes on the Big Island.

Sometimes our grief is a secret we cannot share and is kept deep down in our hearts and known only to God and to ourselves.

The end of the world is your story, and my story, and today it is the gospel story. It involves the moon, the stars, the roaring of the seas and waves. It shakes the powers of heaven.

Think of a day when you felt your world ended and you will feel it here in your heart. On that day the stars no longer mattered and the sun offered you no warmth. Your mind was filled with confusion, your heart with pain, and you were scared to death.

One day we may wake up to realize that life as we planned it did not happen and now we have no idea who we are or where we are going in life.

Although that day might have looked like the end to you, it was not. Jesus tells us that when we are at our end, we must stand up and raise our heads in expectation and hope. We must not focus only on ourselves. We need to focus on God. There is so much more to be seen and we must see it through to the end.

And we need to remember that every ending is a new beginning. As Jesus compares our world to a tree with new leaves, we too have a season of new life. A time for growth and a time for renewal. A season of hope.

Jesus doesn't tell us when the end will happen, only that it will happen, and we need to be ready. As in life, we cannot control what happens to us, but we can choose to control our response, together with God.

The days in Advent are often seen only as a countdown to Christmas. Santa Claus and Christmas trees have been on display at the stores before Halloween!

Shopping lists are growing and the number of shopping days are getting less and less. Parties are being planned, cookies are being baked, guests are coming and families are gathering. Trees need to be decorated and presents need to be wrapped. And between all of this, we still need to live our everyday lives, going to work, or school, paying the bills, walking our dogs, and driving through endless traffic. We feel rushed, we feel a need to hurry. The countdown is on, 23 days before Christmas and the stress level increases. This leads to an Advent that is “hurry up, go to church, open presents, take down the tree, Christmas is over” kind of Advent.

We need to stop and remember that Advent is a time when we should be slowing down a little bit.

Be still for a little bit.

We are to keep awake, looking and listening for the God who is coming to us. We need to remember that we are called to prepare the way of God. And we need to look for Christ in all the unexpected places, in the poor, the hungry, and the needy. We need to remember to feel joy in the anticipation of God's presence in our lives.

So during this season of Advent, take five minutes out of your day to sit silently.

Breathe.

Enjoy the stillness. Wait and listen for that whisper
from God, telling you that everything will be all right.

Amen