

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (2017 - B)

Veni, veni, Emmanuel, O come God with us. Veni, veni Rex gentium, O Come King of nations. Veni, veni O Oriens, O come Thou Day star. Veni, veni Clavis David, O come Thou Key of David. Veni O Jesse Virgula, O come Thou Rod of Jesse. Veni, veni Adonai, O come Lord. Veni O sapientia, O Come Thou wisdom from on High.

These are all ancient titles given to our Lord Jesus Christ. Emmanuel, King of Nations, Day star, Key of David, Rod of Jesse, Lord, Wisdom from on High. Some have Latin roots and some Hebrew. All are taken from the scriptures and are known as the "O Antiphons."

All of these titles remind us of the longing we should have for God. We implore the Lord, O come, come into our hearts and into our lives and into our world. Come and save us Lord because we cannot save ourselves.

The ancient Israelites longed for the coming of the Messiah. A sense of their longing was captured by the Prophet Isaiah who in our first reading cried out, **"Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?" Return [O Lord] for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. O, that you would rend the heavens and come down ..."**

Mankind needs God. We cannot heal our sinful wounds and injuries on our own. We need redemption because we cannot save ourselves. We need Jesus Christ.

Today, more than a few believe that man can save himself. They believe man can heal himself. These folks believe redemption comes from within. They say all we need do is stand up tall, step forward and we can make right what's wrong. Our destiny is in our hands. All we need do is reach out and grasp it. Man is his own god.

But the idea that man can save himself is false, and evidence for this is everywhere. Just think about it. If man can save himself, then how come after all the centuries we have been here on this earth, we still have wars? If man can save himself, then how come after all this time, we still have hunger and disease? If man can save himself, then how come in spite of the great wealth many possess, we still have people who live in desperate poverty?

In fact, the problem with man is deeper than many are willing to admit, and the problem is that we have deep wounds in us, wounds caused by Original Sin that we cannot heal on our own. The fact is that we cannot make ourselves whole. We cannot create a new super race of human beings, a new race without moral flaws and without faults.

That is why we need redemption and for that we need a redeemer. We need a Savior. We need God. If you want more proof for this, you don't need to look at world hunger or world wars. For more proof, all you need to do is look in the mirror and ask, "Why do I keep doing the same things over and over again? Why can't I seem to overcome my faults?"

Why don't I treat my wife better? Why do I enjoy gossip so much? Why do I keep disobeying my parents? Why do I take God's name in vain when I really do love Him? Why do I keep telling lies? Why do I drink too much? Why do I have so much trouble forgiving? Why do I have such short fuse? Why am I so impatient? Why am I so tight with my money when I see someone in need but I can spend hundreds or even thousands on myself without blinking an eye?

The answer is simple. We cannot save ourselves. We need a Savior.

As we get older, most people also get a bit wiser. As time goes by, we come to know ourselves better. We start to see patterns. We come to recognize our habits, both our good ones and our bad ones. We come to recognize our virtues and vices.

As we grow in wisdom, we begin to admit to ourselves that we are not perfect and that we do need help, and when we get to that point, and only when we get to that point, then God can help us. As we pray, as we resolve to do better, and as we ask for God's help, He does help us, and we do get better.

Over time, the wound of original sin does not hurt as much. Over time, the urge to give into sin becomes less strong. Gradually, over time, with the help of God's grace, we break our sinful habits. Over time, we can see that we have become different people from what we were when we were younger. We can see that we have become holier and closer to God.

Over time, God reshapes us and refashions us. He reforms us into His image and likeness. As the Prophet Isaiah said today, **"O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay and you the potter; we are the work of your hands (Is 64:7)."**

Advent reminds us of all of this. It reminds us that we need a Savior and that the world is still in need of redemption.

So what should we be doing this Advent. How can we use this time of preparation well? How can we make it a time of "devout and expectant delight" as the Church calls it?

Well, it's a fact that we are all creatures of habit. It's just easier. Furthermore, the older we get, the more we dislike change. Yet, the spiritual life is all about change. It's all about becoming holier and overcoming the sin in our lives. It's all about becoming a saint.

Many of us have arrived at that age where we are satisfied with how things are. We are done changing. Even in religion. Even in our spiritual lives. We do what we do. We go to Mass each week. We say our prayers before we go to bed each night. We put something in the collection each week. We read a little from the Bible each day, and we call it good.

However, if we are satisfied with our lives, if we are content with where we are at spiritually, then at best, we will never be anything more than mediocre servants of God. If we are not willing to continue to change, then at best we can only hope to be tiny lights in the kingdom of heaven, minor saints who could have become bright stars.

So, here's what I would suggest you do this Advent. Make some deliberate, intentional change in your daily routine. After Mass today, go home and decided to alter your life a bit. Do this to prepare for the coming of Christ. Do this to prepare for Emmanuel. Do this to prepare for Christmas.

And here are some suggestions for you:

- * Change your morning routine. Get up and go to daily Mass. You could receive the Eucharist not once a week but multiple times, and there's nothing stopping many of you, especially those of you who are retired.

- * Take home and use a "Word Among Us" booklet. There are prayers and readings for every day in Advent. It will bring you closer to God.

- * Set up and use an Advent Wreath and the prayers that go with it at your main meal each day.

- * Read something from the Bible or from the Catechism of the Church every day. You can take the Gospel of Saint Luke which has 24 chapters. Read a chapter a day and you will finish on Christmas Eve. Do that and you will learn more about your Lord and Savior whom you love.

There is no one here who could not do one or more of these things.

Lastly, this Advent, go to Confession. Confession is for sinners. Confession is for those who need redemption. Confession is for those who seek forgiveness and who want to be healed from their sins. Confession is for those who wish to become saints. That means Confession is for all of us.

In confession, we come before the Lord, and we say, "Dearest Jesus, I have sinned against love in the following ways. This is how I have failed to love you and this is how I have failed to love my neighbor, and I am sorry. Please forgive me and help me with your grace to amend my life and to grow in your love."

It's humbling to admit to our faults. It's hard to admit we are not perfect. It's not easy to say that we are sinners, but it's the truth, but it's also true that to embrace the truth is liberating. So let Jesus free you this Advent by going to confession.

So then, intentionally make some changes this Advent. If you do, then your Advent will be a fruitful time for you spiritually. It will be one of joyful expectation as you watch for the coming of the Lord, and it will be a delightful time as you wait to celebrate once again the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.