

Homily  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent  
December 5, 2023

Happy New Year. The season of Advent brings us a new liturgical year. The season of Ordinary Time, which ended yesterday afternoon, brought to a close the 2023 Liturgical Year and the beginning of the 2024 Liturgical Year. So, I say again, “Happy New Year! This year, Pope Francis has designated the 2024 Liturgical Year as the Year of Prayer and is asking the faithful to prayerfully prepare for the Jubilee Year, 2025, the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. This was the first of seven ecumenical councils and was the first effort at attaining consensus in the young church. From this council, we have the first part of the Nicene Creed which we proclaim each Sunday. We also have the definitive declaration of the divine nature of Jesus as God the Son, with no beginning or end, and His relationship with God the Father. And we have the agreement on when to celebrate Easter, the pinnacle of Christian life.

The wisdom of the church guides us in every step of our faith journey; the church, founded on the Apostles with Christ Himself as the Head. Jesus tells us to be alert, and the wisdom of the church gives us the season of Advent to pray, to prepare, and to plan for the coming of our Lord and Savior, the Word Incarnate, our very Brother, like us in all ways but sin.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...” (*John 3:16a*)

We hear this so often that I wonder if it has lost its true meaning. Yes, Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, and yes, God did it out of His infinite love for us. But why was this necessary? Why did Jesus have to do this? Why did the God of the Universe, the very Word of God, why did He have to come down, lowering Himself, taking the form of a vulnerable baby, born into this fallen world, naked and poor, laid in a manger?

God wants to be with us. That’s it! He wants to be one with us. And in His love, He gave us Free Will so we can choose to be one with Him – or not. He makes Himself available to us in so many ways. And we can choose to be one with Him when we open our eyes, when we see that He makes Himself available to us.

Most directly, He makes Himself available in His Word; the Word we all heard in scripture this morning. He talks to us, directly in the Gospel, and through His instruments – the prophets and the Apostles. He makes Himself present and available to us at the words of consecration, His very Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. He is available and present to us in all His creation; the trees and the grass, the birds of the air, the fish in the sea, the animals walking around us, the sky with the sun in the daytime and the moon and the stars in the night. And He talks to us directly and personally in prayer. We just need to open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts.

I get so busy with things in my daily life that I often, too often, forget that God is with me at all times. He knows when I rise and go to sleep. He knows my thoughts. He knows my needs. He knows my struggles. He knows my passions and my failures. And I all too often forget that He wants to be with me, to be a part of me, to help me, in all these times.

Jesus tells us to, “Be watchful! Be alert!” We, “...do not know when the lord of the house is coming...” He isn’t trying to scare us; He isn’t telling us to be afraid. He is telling us to be prepared for His coming. So how do we prepare? In what ways do we need to be prepared?

Since He is with us always, we need to look for Him in our daily lives. But not in just the ways we expect; we need to be prepared for the unexpected. We need to be open to all the ways God may come to us.

He comes to us as Himself, in Word, in Sacrament, and in our hearts. It is in these times we need to be open and receptive, to drink in all He has to give us. He comes to us willingly; we need to willingly receive Him.

He comes to us in our neighbor, those near us in need, those for whom we can be Christ. So often I either miss these opportunities because of my own blindness, or I push them away in favor of my own selfish wants and needs.

And He comes to us in our desperation, in our own needs, wants and desires, sometimes when we are blind to them ourselves. We need to most importantly include Christ in our everyday moments, to open our eyes to His presence. He’s here with us; we need to be honest with ourselves and open to that reality, accept Him as we are, broken, fallen, suffering, struggling, yearning not for peace in this world, but yearning for the Peace only Christ can give us, just as He accepts us as we are.

We never know when an opportunity will arise when Christ will show us the way. We may miss the chance if we are only focused on ourselves. That is why we need to be vigilant, to prayerfully remain alert and, as Jesus said, “Watch!”