

## First Sunday of Advent

*Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36*

Today begins the advent season, this *pre*-Christmas season.  
Thus, all of the Christmas music that we hear is painfully premature.  
The Christmas season follows Christmas, from Christmas to the Epiphany

As most of you know, “advent” means “coming”.

We celebrate the *coming* of

- the Christ
- the God-man
- the Light of the world

Now, I am, at least initially, sensing disconnect.

The readings are about *second coming*

The readings are not very “Christmassy”.

The readings are not very “baby Jesus in the manger”.

At Christmas we do, of course, commemorate the first coming of Christ.

But what is the *purpose* of the first coming, the first advent?

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...”**

What is the purpose of the *second coming*, the second advent?

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...”**

It is the *same* Son—who comes to *bring to completion*

what He began at His first coming,

and has been doing ever since he—only in appearance—left.

What has he done, and been doing, and will do completely?

- love the world unto God
- draw the world to the Father who sends Him.

The two comings are inseparable, and, of course,  
the completion, the fulfillment, the fullness is the goal.

Hence, more important is the *second coming*.

[by the way: I invite you this year to include in your Christmas decorations  
signs of the second coming...]

Thus, at Christmas we do not simply *recall* a touching event.  
We open ourselves to a *mystery present* to us: the Word made flesh.  
And because the mystery is so grand and so deep,  
we give ourselves, *at least*, four weeks to do so!

We gather because Jesus has *already come*, and is *in our midst*, is *within us*.  
And His presence within us makes us thirst for his

- final coming
- definitive embrace

So, why the *anguish, distress, dying of fright*, etc. described in the gospel?

Let us recall something from our reading of a similar passage  
in the gospel of Mark two weeks ago:

The turbulence and tribulation

*precede* the coming, are not the coming *per se*.

Note also, what Thomas Aquinas says,

in trying to understand the symbolism of the coming *on clouds*:

**“The cloud, on account of its refreshing influence,  
signifies the mercy of the judge.”**

So, why the *anguish, distress, dying of fright*, etc. described in the gospel?

Perhaps quite simply because, as we approach the end, the term,  
the presence of Christ intensifies (contrary to appearances!)

The intensifying presence of One who is love  
necessarily provokes a strong reaction!

The intensifying presence of One who is love  
demands a re-ordering of all that is not love.

And humanity, *we*, at times, quite simply do not want to love.

Why? Because love requires a certain death to self, which we do not like.

Jesus is coming.

And, in today’s gospel, he tells us to “Be on guard.”

In Mark’s gospel, he tells us to “Stay awake.

In Matthew’s gospel, he tells us to “Be prepared.”

How do we?  
What is our truest option?  
We can “die of fright”. (sounds like fun!)  
But does fear really ready us?  
It is perhaps better than nothing, but...

Actually, an answer is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading (I Thessalonians 3:12-4:2):  
**“May the Lord increase you and make you overflow  
with love for one another and for all...”**

*aaah.*

What *awakens* the human heart most? fear or love?  
In other words, what are we most made to do? fear or love?  
Take a wild guess.  
Fear leads to avoidance.  
Love leads to embracing.  
To be truly prepared, avoiding bad things is not enough.  
To be truly prepared, we must embrace.  
Embrace what? Embrace the One who is coming, the Christ!  
It only makes sense, because only love can meet love,  
and he alone can truly prepare.  
And if he comes in glory—which, in a sense, is *overflowing* love,  
then we must be *overflowing with love*  
Paul expresses his wish that the Lord increase us  
and make us overflow with love, knowing that Christ is coming.  
I do not know about you, but my love does not overflow.  
I need God to seize my heart.  
Overflowing love can only mean *divine* love in and through me.  
Only then will there be no limits.  
Only then can I love each person who comes across my path—even enemies.

This sounds daunting, but this is God’s merciful ambition.  
All we need to do is admit that we do not love enough and let go.  
He will refashion our tired or broken or hardened hearts.  
Then will we be ready:  
**“blameless and holy before our God at the coming of our Lord Jesus”.**

Advent is a time of *great* hope.  
Let us dare to hope.