

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (2024 - C)

Today, we begin the holy Season of Advent, and along with it, we begin our spiritual preparations for Christmas. Advent is a time for us to pause from the busyness of the world. It's a time to review our spiritual lives.

Advent is also a time to look ahead. The word itself means "an arrival" and implies that we are looking for something that isn't here yet, that hasn't yet arrived. The Church calls Advent a time of "devout and expectant delight." Why? Because we are looking forward to a joyful thing, the coming of Christ.

That said, have you ever thought about how much time we spend waiting for things? There are hundreds of examples. We wait to check out at the store. We wait at the doctor's office. We wait at fast food drive-up windows. We wait for the light to change green.

Or what about an expectant mother? She waits for nine months for the birth of her child. High schoolers can't wait to graduate. We wait for our tax refunds; kids wait for Christmas; we wait for summer; we wait for our favorite TV programs; we wait for the cake to rise, for dinner to be ready. In fact, there are countless things we wait for. If we could figure out how much time we spend waiting in life, I wouldn't be surprised if it worked out to ten or fifteen years of our lives.

Now, here's another thing: We all hate waiting. We won't tolerate waiting any longer than we have to. We consider it lost time. So we are always in a hurry to get things done. That's why we have express lanes and fast foods and TV dinners and instant messaging. The Internet lets us order things and do things even faster, and pretty soon we're going to have drones delivering orders right to our doors.

While we wait, we think about how much better everything will be when we finally get what we want. How many times have we said, "Just wait until I'm grown up; then I'm going to live on my own." Or, "I can't wait until I'm married." Or, once we get our own house. Or, as soon as I get this car paid off. Or, once the kids get through college. Or, when we're retired ... We are always waiting for something, for that time when everything will be just right. We are always waiting for this or that thing which is going to satisfy us.

Yet, every time we get to that point, every time we reach a goal and get what we want, we find that we are not satisfied. Each time we get what we've always wanted, it's never quite enough. Something is still missing.

Here's another thing about waiting. It gives us time to think, but lots of people are very uncomfortable when this happens, that is, when they have time to think. Why? Because then they become aware of the emptiness inside them, they become aware that something is missing, and they don't want to find out what it is what it signifies. So, they work even harder, going from one project to the next, or they fill up their time with social media, or even alcohol or drugs. Still, it's a fact that all the activity in the world can't make up for this emptiness inside us all.

So, we need to understand this emptiness; we need to discover what it means and why it's there. We need to find out why, even when we get what we've been waiting for, we're still restless. Why is that? What are we waiting for?

We're waiting for God.

The fact is that we were made by God and we were made for God. That means until we are actually with Him, there will always be an emptiness in us.

For nearly half his life, Saint Augustine was searching. Finally he came to realize that nothing in this life could completely satisfy him. He discovered that all along, while he had been searching for happiness and meaning, what he had really been looking for was God. It was then he cried out, "My soul shall not rest until it rests with You my God."

Just like Saint Augustine, we must also wait. And that is the reason for Advent. By it, the Church reminds us that until we are with God, until Christ comes again, we will remain incomplete and not fully satisfied.

The truth is that only God can satisfy us, and that's something we need to think about from time to time. Advent reminds us that we are not alone in our waiting, in our expectation for the coming of the Lord. The Israelites experienced this too. The Prophet Jeremiah expressed this well. In our first reading he spoke of the Israelite's longing and joyful expectation. He said,

**"The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days ... I will raise up for David a just shoot; He shall do what is right and just in the land."**

This passage reminds us of how in those days long ago, all Israel was waiting for the coming of the Messiah, for God's anointed one. There was a longing and an expectation, but it was a joyful expectation. An expectation which the people knew would bring them peace. They were waiting for the Lord who would save them from their sins.

Advent reminds us of this. We think back on what the world was like before the coming of the Messiah. We think back to that time before the Son of God had come to redeem the human race. We recall the sense of loss and misery which existed throughout the world. It was a spiritual misery. We think back on all the people who were waiting for something but who didn't even know what it was they were waiting for.

At that time, only God's chosen people knew that a Messiah had been promised. He would be born of the tribe of Judah and family of David, and this knowledge gave them joy. Thus, they looked forward to His coming with joyful expectation.

We do the same as we wait for the great feast of Christmas, as we prepare to celebrate and to remember what happened long ago in a stable in the town of Bethlehem in the land of Judah, in an insignificant district in a far off corner of the Roman Empire.

However, Advent also reminds us of a second reason for waiting, and this was referred to in today's holy Gospel. We also wait for Christ, and we do that every day. When Christmas is gone, there will still be a restlessness in us precisely because we're not yet with God.

We are reminded that we also need to look forward to and prepare for Christ's final coming at the end of the world, and this we should also do with joyful expectation. That's because when Christ comes again, we won't have to wait any longer. Then our hearts will be filled. Then we will be satisfied. Then we will possess what we have been made for, namely, God Himself.

Saint Paul wants us to be ready when the Lord comes again, and so he urges us to **“conduct ourselves and behave even more, in a way that is pleasing to God.”**

So then, next time you find yourselves waiting, don't waste your time by doing nothing on the one hand or by filling up your time with unimportant things on the other. Instead, realize that God has given you some time to pray to Him and to think about Him. While you wait, turn to God. He is the only one Who can fill your longing.

Especially during Advent, don't just rush about with hardly a moment to spare. Instead, make Advent a time of joyful expectation. Remember, you are in charge of your life, and you are the one in charge of what goes on in your own home. So, take charge of things.

During Advent, make sure you set aside time for God. Take the time God has given you and pray to Him. Pray for your family and friends and for your loved ones. Pray for peace on earth and an end to war. Pray for reconciliation among peoples throughout the world.

Pray for those who are out of work and who are anxious about their future and how they will pay their bills and take care of their families. Pray for our college students. Pray for those who are in the military and who are far from home at this time.

Pray for those who will be married this year. Pray for those who will be confirmed. Pray for expectant mothers and for those who will graduate. Pray for all those who look forward to the future with hope that their hopes might be realized.

Let us also pray for reconciliation. Perhaps you have a family member or neighbor you haven't spoken to or had some fight with. Why not break the ice and see if things can be patched up. Take the first step in overcoming misunderstandings. Send a note or give someone a call. Pray especially that in this coming year, you might gain a deeper understanding and greater commitment to forgiveness and pardon and reconciliation.

Especially, seek out reconciliation with God. Make sure that you go to confession and receive forgiveness for your sins. That's exactly why Jesus came into the world, to save us from our sins, and so let us ask for His pardon and peace in this great sacrament.

Finally, this Advent, don't forget to tell God how much you love Him. Tell Him how much you are waiting for Him, of how you are waiting with “joyful expectation” waiting for Him to come again. Amen.