

## 1<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT - C - 2006

*“Make room.”*

It almost sounds to me like the church is crying “*Wolf!*” Every year at this time, you’d think the sky was falling, that the end is near and that Lord is about to return and we had better be ready. Well, I’ve heard this message for years, and still the Lord hasn’t returned. To be perfectly honest with you, it’s pretty hard for me to get all worked up about the urgency of it all. So why does the Church keep telling us to get ready? What’s going on?

Well, Advent is not just about the end times, or the second coming of Christ. Clearly, when that time comes, it would be tragic if we missed it, if we were not ready. (Of course we won’t miss it, but we may not be ready.) So the church reminds us to be ready all the time. But, as we move further into the Advent season, our focus shifts from Christ’s second coming to Christ’s first coming. Throughout history, God had tried to prepare the Jewish people to receive Jesus when he was born in to the world.

Unfortunately, only a small faithful remnant was ready when he came, Mary and Joseph being among them. But most of the Israelites, following their religious leaders, didn’t recognize Jesus as the savior at all. In fact, they killed him, the very one God had sent to redeem them. What a shame. In other words, they didn’t recognize Jesus because they weren’t ready.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that the Church is trying to help us prepare for Christmas, lest, when it comes, we are so caught up in the glitz of it all that we miss its significance for our lives. The reason it doesn’t take a rocket scientist is because preparing for Christmas is not the field of a rocket scientist. (*Joke*) It’s the field of theologians, scripture scholars and liturgists. While Jesus cannot be born again into our world like

he was that first Christmas, Jesus can be born within us through grace, that is, through the Spirit of his love. Jesus came to share with us his divine life, and to walk the journey of life with us. So this is a third way that Advent is meant to prepare us for the coming of Christ: his coming to us through grace. And that grace will be offered to us this Christmas. The question is, will we recognize it? Will it touch our hearts? Will it transform our discouragement let's say, into hope, our depression into a desire to live again, our pessimism into new possibilities? It would seem to me that our effort to prepare our hearts for Christmas will be a good indicator of how we are preparing ourselves for Christ at the end of time. It may even reveal how seriously we take our Christian faith.

While we may typify the spirit of Advent to be that of waiting patiently, may I suggest another aspect of this Advent season, that of making room? The two are actually very closely related. Like any expectant mother, the "waiting patiently" part is not a passive waiting at all, like we're waiting for someone to announce that our "*flight is now boarding.*" It is a looking forward with joyful expectation. It's a spirit of waiting that says "*I can hardly wait!*"

But an expectant mother does not just wait. She has to make room for her baby to grow within her. And that takes time. In fact, if the baby comes too soon, it is not good news. So she takes special care of herself during her pregnancy, skipping that glass of wine at dinner, getting her rest and eating the proper foods. She knows the dangers if she is careless. And as she moves closer to her time, there is something else going on inside of her that may even surprise her. She is growing in love for her child. That new life is shaping her life, and after its birth, that love can become almost overwhelming. And if she has other children she will learn that the nature of

love is **not** such that it is divided up between the children but that it is total and complete for each child. Love, of its nature, is truly a reflection of Divine Life, Divine Love. God loves each of us, his children, unconditionally.

As a child is a blessing to any parent, Jesus is a blessing to all of us who make room for His Spirit to grow in our hearts. But, like the mother, we have to be careful, as St. Luke warns us in the Gospel, that our *“hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness.”* How can the Spirit of love develop in us if we are not about the ways of love in our lives each day? Could this be why the Church gave us our second reading from St. Paul that says, *“May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all?”* Is that the way we are supposed to wait? Is that the way we are supposed to make room? I think so.

We have to take time to prepare for the Grace of Christmas. It doesn't just happen. We have to make room by opening our hearts to the love that God is pouring over us during this season of expectation, or it will just pass us by. I encourage you to take part in the mini-retreats Joe and Maggie talked about last weekend. Our Archbishop is encouraging us to fast on Wednesdays, and I am urging you to slow down. Some say the next three weeks will be the busiest of the year. We must be careful that we don't overdo. Good advice to anyone awaiting the birth of new life.

May the Eucharist we are about to celebrate strengthen us in our faith and hope and love. And may this faith and hope and love create room for the coming of Jesus through grace into our hearts, our homes and our world.