

1st Sunday of Advent: Be Vigilant and always pray

We concluded the church year last Sunday and now we are into a new liturgical year which begins on this first Sunday of Advent. During Advent, we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ at Christmas, in the present and the future at the end of time. We strive to slow ourselves down, and draw closer to God by listening for his voice through prayer, reading, and reflecting on sacred scripture.

All three readings for this first Sunday of Advent highlight the rich themes of hope, vigilance, and patient waiting. The readings bring us to learn from the experiences of the ancient Israel on what it means to be people of hope. The chosen people experienced many years of captivity in Babylon because of their infidelity to God. They were consumed by despair and hopelessness. Amid their exile and hopeless situation, the ancient people longed for the dawn of their redemption.

In today's first reading, God instructed the prophet Jeremiah to speak to the weary people that their redemption is near at hand. God promised to liberate them and restore their fortunes. He assured the house of Judah and Israel that a righteous branch will spring up from the line of David to reign over them in the ways of love, goodness, truth, justice, and peace.

Jesus is this virtuous branch who came to fulfil God's promises. He brought us salvation.

In the gospel, Jesus predicts catastrophic events such as frightening signs on the earth and in the heavens and tribulations that will take place before the end times. He tells us to always be vigilant and pray that we have the strength to escape the horrors that are imminent and to stand before the son of man. He cautions us against the lure of the world, especially complacency, moral laxity, excessive drinking, and the anxieties of life so we are not caught off guard like a thief by his sudden return. The Lord wants us to be awake and vigilant for his final coming. To be awake and alert means living in righteousness or doing what is right and just. It means growing in love and holiness.

St. Paul urges us in the second reading to live in a manner pleasing to God. He prays that we may increase and abound in love for one another and be found blameless before God.

In this holy season, we are offered the opportunity to deepen our relationship with God and one another. We can make the most of this grace-filled season by engaging ourselves in some spiritual exercises such as participating in a group bible study, devoting time for self-examination and prayer.

As we enter a new church year, it is important that we renew our hope and trust in God's steadfast love and goodness for us. Along with the psalmist we lift our eyes and hearts to God and ask for his guidance. We join our voices together in prayer as we say, "To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth, and teach me, for you are my Savior, and for you I wait all day" (Psalm 25:1b).

God bless,

Fr. Dr. Ben