

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Year C: Jer 33:14-16; Ps 25; 1 Thes 3:12-4:2; Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

November 28, 2021

Fr. David Pignato

The beginning of the second reading today is a great summary of the goal of this season of Advent. St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “*May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ..., so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus.*” Strengthening our hearts, increasing our love for others, and growing in holiness, to prepare for the coming of Christ – that’s what Advent is all about. Each year, we have this holy season of Advent to help us prepare to celebrate Christmas. But the reason we prepare to celebrate Christmas each year is to prepare ourselves for the Second Coming of Christ, or when we will meet Him at the end of our lives. We should see Advent each year as part of our lifelong project of preparing our souls to meet Christ.

There’s so much to do, to prepare to meet Christ. But strengthening our hearts, increasing our love for others, and growing in holiness is a good way to summarize it all. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the day of His return, and He warns us not to allow our hearts to become drowsy, as we wait to meet Him. He says, “*Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.*” He tells us to be vigilant and alert, so that we will not be unprepared to meet Him.

So, the first thing we have to do is strengthen our hearts and keep them from becoming drowsy. A drowsy heart is a sluggish heart, a listless spirit, lacking energy, and maybe even interest in the things that matter the most. Jesus says that carousing and drunkenness can make our hearts drowsy, but so also can the anxieties of daily life. Hopefully, most of us guard against carousing and drunkenness. But the anxieties of daily life are a much more common distraction for most of us. We are faced daily with the demands of our jobs and our families, the pressure to pay bills and give people the attention that they need and deserve. Many of us have constant deadlines for our work, and constant requests for our attention and time. We feel like we work in an emergency room, triaging all the requests and emails and phone calls, and then lamenting that we don’t have enough time to do everything that is requested of us. And while we do all this, moving at a frantic and frenetic pace, we often fail to focus on our own souls and our hearts can become drowsy about preparing to meet Christ.

Another thing that can make our hearts drowsy is attachments to things other than the Lord. We all develop certain interests in life, and we learn to enjoy certain things that are often good in themselves. But we can become attached to such things in a way that distracts us from the more important matter of our relationship with God. A great example is sports. We all know how popular sports are in our culture. And sports are among the more wholesome activities and entertainments in our culture. But when sports become more important than religion and our duties to God, we know something has gone wrong. If watching or playing sports is more important than attending Mass and obeying the Commandments of God, something is very wrong.

We might think that sports keep our hearts active and alert, full of interest and energy. But if sports take our interest away from God and our faith, they can actually make our hearts grow drowsy about the more important things of the Lord. Let me repeat: sports are among the most healthy, wholesome and virtuous activities and entertainment in our culture today. But even so, sports can become such a priority and attachment for us that they distract us from the more important matter of our faith. When we finally meet Christ, if He finds our hearts sluggish and drowsy about the religious life, it won't be a good excuse to say that we were busy and excited about sports. Many faithful athletes know this and they remind us of the more important matter of being faithful to God. Our faith does not require us to avoid or give up sports, but it does require us to put sports in their proper place, and to make God and our faith the top priority in our lives.

So, one of the goals of Advent is to strengthen our hearts and keep them from becoming drowsy and distracted, so that we are prepared to celebrate Christmas and also prepared to meet Christ when He comes. The reason we prepare for Christmas each year is to get our souls ready to meet Christ at the end of our lives. And we do this by strengthening our hearts, freeing them from anxiety and attachments, so that we can increase our love for others, as Christ taught us, and grow in holiness in His sight.