

1st Sunday in Advent A

I hope everyone had a happy and safe Thanksgiving. Judy and I had a very good day with great food and plenty of family around the table.

On Thanksgiving, I had a couple of interesting observations. One was that Judy and I didn't have any disagreements. We have very different cooking styles. We always seem to come to the same result - delicious dinner, but our getting there can be a bit rocky.

I am all about the finish line. All the food must be done at the same pre-determined time. It takes a lot of planning on my part to get there and when I hit a bump, I can get a little upset.

Judy is about the recipes and presentation. She's a regular Martha Stewart, but without all that money.

But, this year, Judy cooked almost all of the meal by herself and I did my best to stay out of the kitchen. She did a wonderful job..... and we ate within a 15 minute window of when we planned. A good day for all around us.

The second observation came when Judy, my youngest daughter and my oldest granddaughter were going through the ads for black Friday. As they talked a plan began to take shape. By evening, they had a strategy that would shame the Green Berets. It was sophisticated, detailed and strictly timed.

The planning was augmented with anticipation. There were back-up plans in case a line was too long or the store was out of an item. Very focused. And it worked very well for them.

I admit, I was impressed!

These two events caused me to reflect on the many things in our lives that require planning. Some are long-range, like preparing a will or pre-planning our funeral or setting up a retirement plan.

Those things, once planned and set in motion just sort of take care of themselves. Aside from the initial efforts, you just need to budget them in.

Then there are the shorter-range plans. These are the ones that surprised me because the list seemed to grow exponentially. In a given month, I will have to plan literally hundreds of events.

Dr. appointments, lunch breaks, dinner times, favorite TV shows, waking, going to bed, getting to the stores, getting to work on time, reading time, buying gas, researching homilies and writing them, maintaining web-sites, exercising, resting. Even our vacations and down-times are planned for.

It was amazing to me.

Then I recalled how much tighter these schedules were when our kids were at home.

(PAUSE)

Many of us claim to be poor at planning, but I would bet that if you took inventory of the planning that you do in just a week, you might be surprised at how well you do plan.

The point I am trying to drive home is that we live according to plans, schedules and preparations.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Most of us think of Advent as that time when we get ready for Christmas, and that is correct.

For many of us, it is a time of decorating and shopping and planning for the day that we celebrate the Birth of Jesus with friends and family.

Planning takes center stage, and in our better moments we remember the “Reason for the Season”.

And for all the focus we give to the manger, we know that Jesus is not “born again” on December 25th. He was born in a particular time and place in history, but it is good to remind ourselves about the specialness and uniqueness of His birth in Bethlehem and what it means for us.

So where are the readings about the stable, the donkey and the shepherds?

Oh, they are coming, but today we are reminded that what we do in Advent is not only plan for the celebration of Christmas, but we also anticipate the future coming of Jesus at the end of time.

Today’s scriptures remind us that God makes plans too, and He tells about many of them so that we might be prepared, so that we might plan and look forward to the fulfillment of His plans.

However, the planning on our part is neither short, nor long-ranged. We cannot treat the second coming in the same way as we would a shopping trip, or contributing to a 401K.

Jesus tells us today that “we also must be prepared, for at an hour we do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” so, ideally we should be in a state of constant readiness.

The readings have a bit of “fire and brimstone” to their message.

Judgment is coming..... and it will be unpleasant for those who did not prepare for it.

But the message is also one of hope.

Whenever God makes judgement or prepares to make judgement, He also makes a path for us to follow so that it may be favorable to us.

Jesus recalls the story of Noah and the flood of Judgement God sent upon the Earth.

But we are also reminded, in our memory, that God made provisions for the salvation of humanity and all creatures on Earth through Noah and the Ark.

Today's portion of Isaiah was written during a time when the people of Israel were in exile. This reading gives a very clear way to be spared from judgement:

“Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob, WHY?..... so
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths.”

And in that same reading we hear a bright promise, that when the judgement comes:

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares”
and that

“one nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again”

As I pointed out earlier, we are really pretty good at planning and preparing when it comes to the “stuff” that can clutter and wreak havoc in our lives if we let it.

But how well do we prepare for the future coming of Christ?

Advent is a special gift of time. It is a break from the “ordinary” in the Church year, and an opportunity to anticipate and prepare for things eternal.

I would challenge us over the next four-plus weeks to do just that. Take time out during this busy season and begin a new routine, perhaps a prayer time, or a daily reflection on scripture.

Perhaps we can beat a few of our own “swords into plowshares”, reaching out to distanced friends or perhaps estranged family.

And to “come up to the Lord’s mountain”, and “be instructed in His Ways” not only every Sunday, here in this place, but every day in our hearts and minds and souls.

PETITIONS

For the Church..... that during this Season of Advent, she will continue to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.....We Pray To The Lord

For our public officials..... that they conduct the affairs of government with integrity.....We Pray To The Lord

For our young people..... that they may come to know and see Christ through our community and example of Faith.....We Pray To The Lord

In thanksgiving for God’s bountiful blessings.....We Pray To The Lord

In Thanksgiving for those six men studying for the Priesthood for our Diocese, especially Scott Harter.....We Pray To The Lord

For a greater awareness of the poor....and For those who work outdoors this Winter...We Pray To The Lord