

Are we ready? Words that are certain to strike terror into the hearts of people in our western secular society at this time of year with only...25/26 shopping days until Christmas! There is a difference in how we wait for things as we grow older – especially around this time of year: most children wait with hope and joyful anticipation of all the excitement and fun

Most adults wait in dread, panic or fear of all the preparation, planning, company and the bills!

In many ways, these are the two ways that distinguish the practice of our faith as Catholics as well: here we are at the beginning of another liturgical year; we begin today this season of Advent; a time of preparation of getting ready to welcome Jesus into our hearts and our homes: The liturgical or church seasons remind us of that as we spend these next four weeks preparing in a special way to be open to the arrival and working of our Savior, Jesus in our lives. We commemorate the coming of God among us as one of us; as a human being in a specific historical moment in time: but this dwelling of God with us is much more than that: It is a reminder that throughout the year; throughout our lives; God is with us; and His graces are given to us – so long as we are open to receiving Him and His graces.

We can be childlike and wait for Jesus with hope and joyful anticipation

Or we can wait in apathy or fear or dread ...the choice ultimately is ours and whether or not we seek to be open to Christ in our lives.

In our first reading: Jeremiah - God speaks through His prophet, reminding that God keeps His promises: that God will fulfill His promise to send a Messiah – this particular passage continues to speak of a descendent of David who will rule forever and during whose reign there will be a perpetual priesthood and sacrifice: a prophecy that could only be fulfilled with the coming of Jesus

This is a promise not only for Israel, but for all people for all time. God's promise is a promise not only for a historic people – it is for all of the baptized; we received a promise from God at our own baptisms, that as adopted daughters and sons of God He would always be with us and as long as we hold to that, we have a certain hope and a certain openness to the presence of Christ in our midst each and every day

It may seem a little odd that the Gospel for the beginning of the New Year is from Jesus description of the 'end times' – but it is precisely in this description

that Jesus reminds us of being prepared and being ready to meet Him at any time...not just at the 'end of the world' ' or at our own personal 'ends' ", our deaths, but each and every day: Jesus is always in our midst in the many people we encounter and the places we happen to be. Listen again to the words Jesus uses, when the encounter with Him is near;" stand up, raise your heads , for our redemption is near!" These are not words of fear or dread or despair – these are words of hope – words of encouragement!

This passage is from St. Luke's Gospel – this is the Gospel we will mainly use throughout this coming Church year, 'Cycle C'; and while it is one of what they call the 'synoptic gospels' –meaning the same (Mathew and Mark are the others) there is a uniqueness in each of the gospels as to how the principal image of theme of Jesus is portrayed: St. Luke's Gospel is very much the Gospel of the weak and the lowly; it is a gospel which particularly dwells on Jesus miracles and works among the poor and the outcast: St. Luke's is very much a Gospel in which Jesus elevates the dignity of people, stresses forgiveness, and emphasizes the importance of prayer, and how the way we treat others is the way we treat Jesus; that our love for God is reflected in our love for others.

So because this Gospel stresses this relationship and the finding of Jesus in others, we can use this New Year as a starting point really; not only to prepare for the big 'push' of Christmas – to significantly prepare through prayer and the Sacraments (particularly reconciliation) for the coming of Christ as a baby in a manger; but more importantly to prepare for the coming of Jesus each and every day, in our everyday lives. It is living this way, that we, as St. Paul says in our second reading, "may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of Jesus and all His saints." Jesus and all His saints are all around us, all the time, every day:

It is through the grace of God, promised to us at our baptisms, that we can open our eyes and hearts to see Jesus and all His saints around us every day; to wait in joyful anticipation and with hope of His coming among us.

It is this grace of God that can give us all the strength each and every day to make that choice, and tell Jesus each time we meet Him, 'Yes, I'm ready'....