

**Homily for the First Sunday in Advent, November 28, 2009**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We as a people tend to be ones that look for signs and read into them. The growth of science and knowledge has encouraged us to use our reasoning in every aspect of our lives. We are now almost instinctively conditioned to notice and interpret signs. Signs give us clues of change, of newness, of transition, of hope, of crisis, of openness and of transparency. Signs cause reactions in us-surprise, fear, uncertainty, happiness etc.

We in Canada are blessed to have 4 distinct seasons and each has its own signs. When in March or April, we see that the snow has melted and shoots of grass and flowers are beginning to pop up, we know that spring is here. Then we face the stifling heat and humidity a few months later, we understand that we have summer. Then at October or early November, we know that Fall is with us when the leaves change colours and then shed. Finally, it feels cold, nights below 0 and snow tires required by law and we are aware that winter is upon us.

Something similar took place when we entered the church this evening.

Suddenly we were struck by the stark velvet cloth with which our altar is

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draped today. It was not there last week, but it will adorn our altar until Christmas. The color velvet is a sign that something is happening in our liturgical year, for today we begin the exciting Season of Advent, the season that reminds us to prepare for Christmas.

Advent, coming from the word *Adventus* means coming. The coming is twofold. The coming of Jesus at Christmas, which celebrates the mystery of the Incarnation, the unbelievable love of God for sinful man, a love that drives the Father to send His Son to reconcile us back to Him. The second coming is what the readings of today invite us to enter into, the coming of Jesus at the end of the ages, at the end of time. We will see in the infant baby Jesus, a man like us in all but sin. But today we are reminded that this same child is also the cosmic king, the king of all creation.

Signs are there not only to be noticed, but also to be interpreted and acted upon. Signs are meant to evoke the appropriate response action in us. When we see signs of spring, we plant our flowers and start preparing the garden. Summer is often a time to de-stress, take time off, maybe go on a vacation. When there are warnings of floods or typhoons, people take action to avoid or limit the damage that is expected. The Gospel today talks to us about

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signs that will accompany the coming of Jesus at the end of time. There will be changes that will take place in the heavens, the sun, moon, stars and the changes will be frightening. The external signs will evoke in us internal reactions. But the interesting thing the Gospel tells us is that the reaction of the unbeliever will be different from that of the believer. The unbeliever will be filled with fear as the end of time and the second coming of Jesus approaches, because the signs will be scary. The believer on the other hand, in the face of the same scary signs will be filled with joyful expectation and confidence, as if something good is being announced.

On a practical level, one of the things that one notices in funeral parlours is how families of believers grieve as opposed to the families of unbelievers. Generally when one goes to wake of an unbeliever, we see not only a sense of sadness and loss; but also despair and darkness. The room is usually a pall of silence and gloom and one can almost cut the hopelessness with a knife. When a believer dies, the sense of pain and loss is there, but there is also feeling that all is not lost, there is no despair as death is seen as a passing from one life to another that is eternal. It is the same with how believers will face the prospect of end time.

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So how are we to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus that will be accompanied by all those frightful signs? We are told that we are to stand up with heads erect, because we are going to be redeemed, so we are to look forward to the coming. But we are also told not to worry as to the exact timing of the event. None of us knows when. The best way however to be prepared for something that we know is inevitable but as to whose exact timing is unknown to any human is to be prepared at all times, pray and ask for strength. Secondly, we are not to lose heart; but persevere. Jeremiah in the first reading reminds the people of Israel who were in captivity in Babylon, to take heart since the Lord will keep his promise of saving them. We too, who place our trust in Jesus are not to despair of the futility of this life or the fact that our human eyes do not see signs that encourage us. The Lord kept his promise and that promise was kept in the Incarnation that led up to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What are your hopes for this Advent season as you prepare for Jesus in your heart? What do you want to say to the baby that is to be born? What do you want to say to the same child who is the Lord of the universe? The overall theme chosen by the Diocese for this liturgical year is “God keeps his Word”

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and the Advent theme is “His Light is dawning”. We already can see a lot of Christmas lights put up.

It would honour the Lord if this week I/you/we can ponder on some specific times and events in our lives where we saw clearly how God was faithful to us. Then as you re-live those moments, let your heart be filled with gratitude to a faithful God. Also, is there one area in your life where you would like the light of Christ to enter more strongly, to remove the darkness, to fill it with hope and joy? Further, how can I reach out to my neighbour who is in need or hurting?

As we continue with our Eucharist this evening, let us be joyful knowing that we are a redeemed people, that the one who will judge us at the end of time is the same child who will be born like one of us and who won for us salvation through his death and resurrection. We are therefore above all a blest people. So, with grateful hearts let us prepare ourselves to receive Jesus and to show the world around the same love that He showed us. Amen.