

A Short Teaching on Advent
by Deacon Gerry Palermo

Greetings on this 1st Sunday of Advent

Readings: Is 63: 16b-17, 19b; 64:2b-7; PS 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; 1 Cor 1:3-9; Mk 13:33-37

Advent is a liturgical season of the Church, the four Sundays leading into the Nativity of the Lord. There is a two part watchful state: (1) for the coming of the Messiah and (2) for the second coming of the Christ (Parousia).

We enter into the historical longing of the Jewish people for the Christ, noting Luke 10:24, “many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it”. The historical Jesus brought us into union with the Father, dedicated his life to our redemption and spent his life in the restoration of man in miracles so numerous ‘the whole world [could not] contain the books that would be written (Jn 21:25). We too watch and wait for the Lord to return and usher in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In both the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the Watchfulness warning is preceded by the lesson of the fig tree. The fig tree is a symbol of the fullness of what life offers. In sacred scripture, to be sitting under a “man’s own fig tree” is to be full of all the good things in life. So when we see the fig tree blossom, its buds bursting, and the tree producing a new fragrance into the air, we know the time is full for the new Heaven and the new Earth.

Watchfulness is primarily a joyful event, much like the coming of a new born baby. Husband and wife, and all their friends have watchful and hopeful expectations. For the pregnant woman, there is a radical reorientation of her life. All other concerns now are secondary to the birth of her child. Every sight, sound, good, hour and hope is wrapped up in and about the child to come.

Why then does Jesus use the watches of the night to describe His coming? Evening, midnight, cockcrow and morning are specific times and moments of grace in the human experience.

Evening is the time when men encounter the Lord, engage in conversation with him and ask him the important questions of life. Midnight is the hour of judgment. It is the midnight hour when the impact of decisions are made known. The cockcrow is the hour of decision. We are at our most openness to truth, and at our weakest moment toward sin. And, finally, morning is the light of day when all things, good and evil, are made known.

Each of these times, evening, midnight, cockcrow and morning, are the times of conversion, providing for a radical reorientation of our lives like the pregnant woman. What is conversion?

Conversion is three basic things: (1) Realize we are in a sort of Unity and Ordo (order) with the Divine and other humans; (2) we go into a sort of Confession where we seek the healing of God, express humility and charity in all events and allow God to enter into the recesses of our souls; and (3) we realize we are made for the Common Good of all – family, neighbors, work and the social spheres are within our responsibility. This is conversion.

May your Advent watching be a Joyful watching. May you converse with God in the Evening calm, seek His mercy in the midnight of your life, be strengthened in virtue in the cockcrow hour and, finally, arrive at your morning, revived, and calling upon His name (PS 80:19).

Peace be with you.

Deacon Gerry