

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT; Cycle – A; Nov. 27th 2022
Is.2: 1-5; Rom. 13: 11-14; Mt. 24: 37-44

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Christmas is the most joyful celebration in the Church. The light decorations around is the vivid expression of the internal joy. In fact, the celebration of the birth of Christ started in Rome only in the middle of the 4th century. Soon a period of preparation was attached to this celebration so that the faithful may prepare well spiritually. In France Bishop Perpetuus of Tours issued a regulation asking the faithful to fast three days a week from Nov. 11 through Dec. 25th. You can imagine the strict penitential nature of that period. This practice spread to different countries varying the starting date of the preparatory period. Rome introduced the period of preparation only in the 6th century and it was decided that it should be from Dec. 1 to 25 and no penitential character was attached to it. Eventually this became the practice of the Universal Church and same rule continues today. According to the new regulation the Advent is supposed to begin on the last Sunday of November (*if it falls towards the end of the month*) or the first Sunday of December.

The Advent wreath with four candles is part of our long-standing Catholic tradition. At the same time, the custom of using the advent wreath is not part of the Eastern Churches but only the Western Church. However, the actual origin of it is uncertain. There is evidence of pre-Christian Germanic peoples using wreaths with lit candles during the cold and dark December days as a sign of hope in the future with warm Sunny days of spring. In the middle Ages, the Christians perhaps adopted this tradition and used Advent wreathes a part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas. Perhaps, the use of candles attracted the Christians. After all, Christ is “the light that came into the world” to dispel the darkness of sin. The wreath is made of various evergreens, signifying continuation and blooming of life. The circular form of the wreath shows that it has no beginning or end which symbolizes the eternity of God and immortality of soul and everlasting life promised to us through Christ. The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent. A tradition is that each week represents one thousand years, to sum to the 4,000 years from Adam and Eve until the birth of the savior. The purple candles in particular symbolize the penance, prayer and good works. The third candle is rose or pink to show that the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent and they have reason to rejoice. The color rose is the sign of joy.

The name advent was originally used to denote only the birth of Jesus, and it

was applied to Christmas alone. But later the preachers expanded its meaning to include the whole period of preparation in which the word advent is now used. The original intention of this period was to give the faithful a time for strict spiritual preparation to welcome the coming of Christ. Unfortunately, due to the commercialization of the season in the modern age, the spiritual aspect of this period is totally lost.

As soon as we hear the word advent or Christmas we think only about the **birth of the Lord in the History**. But today the word represents **the threefold coming of Jesus**. In the first sense it is meant for the **birth of Jesus** which took place more than 2000 years ago; secondly it stands for **the second coming of the Lord** at the end of the age and thirdly **the coming of Christ in our** individual life. The Church in the first century onwards believed in the second glorious coming of the Lord who will come to judge the world. *There are 318 references in the New Testament to the second coming of the Lord.* So together with the Christmas celebrations the Church draws our attention to the second coming of the Lord. Hence on the first Sunday of Advent the gospel reading gives the account of the Second Coming of the Lord.

Through the apocalyptic writing, in today's gospel Matthew shows us that the Lord will appear while the people are busy with material things and only 50% will be prepared to welcome him. Matthew makes it very clear that while the people are busy with their routine activities, the coming of the Lord takes place uneventfully. He compares the situation with the time of Noah. So Jesus warns the faithful to be prepared and vigilant so that we may be able to welcome the Lord, even at the least expected time. For our personal life the second coming of the Lord meant my last day in the world which can happen even today. Very often you and I postpone the spiritual preparation for tomorrow so that we can do many other things today. But that tomorrow is not ours and the word tomorrow is very dangerous to our spiritual life. We have only today to live; so let us live each day as if it is my last day. For anything in the world we can make a schedule but not for the coming of the Lord. Let us make a simple resolution as we begin another advent season that this Christmas will give us a little more Christ experience and bring us close to him.