

Homily for the 1st Sunday of Advent, Year C

December 1, 2024
St. Bavo Parish
Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16 (The days are coming when the Lord will fulfill his promise to the house of Israel and Judah.)

Responsory: Psalm 25 (To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.)

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 (May the Lord make you blameless in holiness at the coming of our Lord Jesus.)

Gospel: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 (Then they will see the Son of Man coming with power and glory.)

There's an interesting cinematic technique that you sometimes see in the opening scenes of science fiction movies. Through the wonders of computer generated imagery, the camera first shows a scene on a *cosmic* scale — an entire galaxy or solar system, for example — and then the focus rapidly narrows to a single planet, and then all the way down to the people. For the audience, this movement from the *cosmic* to the *worldly* to the *personal* situates the story that they are about to hear in a much wider context. It's a way of showing that these scenes, which take place in one particular location and one particular time, are part of a much bigger narrative, with implications that extend far beyond just the characters and events that appear on the screen. That's exactly what the readings for the Sundays of Advent do for us.

This First Sunday of Advent opens on a cosmic scale, picking up where the feast of Christ the King left off last weekend. Christ is portrayed as the "Son of Man," who rules over all Creation and threatens to bring judgment upon all the peoples of the earth. Then, as we progress through the Advent Season, the focus narrows considerably. First, John the Baptist appears, announcing that the long-awaited Messiah is about to make his appearance *in the land of Israel*. Then, we're introduced to Mary and Joseph, who learn that they are going to be the *parents* of the promised Savior. Finally, on Christmas Day, we zoom in even further, to a *baby* wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. That humble scene, featuring a poor family in an obscure little town on the outskirts of Jerusalem, will be revealed as a key moment in a great drama, with massive implications for all humanity.

As the entire Church begins this Advent journey together, we know that we are headed, ultimately, toward contemplating the Birth of the Savior on Christmas Day. But for now, we're still way out at the cosmic scale, trying to situate the Christ event in its wider context. The bigger story is the *Kingdom of God*, which existed long before the Incarnation, but which took on a whole new dimension because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The promise of salvation for God's holy ones was already plain to see in many of the Old Testament prophecies. The First Readings that we will hear over these four weeks of Advent include passages from Jeremiah and Baruch, during the time of the Babylonian Exile, another from Zephaniah, shortly before the Exile, and another from Micah, about a century earlier. All four prophets anticipate a glorious Kingdom of God, where all of God's faithful people will be able to live in peace and security, unlike the violent and unstable conditions that they were experiencing in their time. To their contemporaries, all looked bleak and hopeless. The nation of Israel was barely holding

itself together, struggling to cling to its faith and maintain its covenant with God. But, all of these prophets insisted that there was a *bigger picture*, a divine plan that would be revealed at the proper time. God would act to save his people, and no earthly power would be able to stop the Lord from bringing his grand plan to fulfillment.

We know how the coming of Christ fits into that plan. But, as we begin this Advent Season, we try to take a step back from the life and times of Jesus and appreciate *how* and *why* the Incarnation of God came about. And to do that, it helps to put ourselves in the shoes of those people who *awaited* the Messiah, who eagerly hoped for a “Day of the Lord,” when salvation would come upon the earth. We cry out, “Come, Lord Jesus,” and we feel some of that same joy and expectation which brought hope to their lives *before* the arrival of the Savior.

Even though Christ has already come and accomplished all that the Father asked him to do, we still live in a world where the signs of God’s Kingdom are often obscured by evil and sin. Like our ancestors who first heard those prophetic voices centuries earlier, we also struggle to see the bigger picture, to appreciate what Christ *has done* and what more God *intends to do*. For example, we don’t know if God will intervene, once again, in a way that dramatically changes, or even brings to an end, all life on earth. Will there be another “Day of the Lord” even more climactic than the Incarnation or the Resurrection of Christ? Will the Risen Lord return in glory, not just to *conquer* evil and sin, robbing them of their power to destroy us, but to *extinguish* them once and for all? That certainly is what the early Christians believed. At the beginning of his ministry, St. Paul was convinced that Christ would return *soon*. When he wrote his First Letter to the Thessalonians, in which he exhorted them to be “blameless in holiness at the coming of the Lord Jesus,” he thought that the coming of the Lord would occur within *months or years*, not centuries or millennia. However, in his later letters, Paul’s view shifts noticeably, to reflect a view that is much more like ours today.

Whether we expect a climactic Day of the Lord to come upon us at any moment, or whether we expect life on earth to pretty much grind along as it has for the past two thousand years, the Advent Season can still be a time of great anticipation and hope. This week, as we hear Jesus speak about terrifying signs in the sun, the moon and the stars, with “earthly nations in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves,” we can remember that the message to God’s faithful ones has *always* been to stand erect and look forward to the time of their deliverance. Whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, all the scenes of divine judgment are also scenes of *salvation* for God’s faithful people. So, however we may choose to interpret these passages in terms of earthly events, they certainly speak of eternal glory for all of us who believe in Christ. Hence, there’s no need to fear, and *every* reason to rejoice.

Our salvation is already at hand, because Christ has already come and won the victory over sin and death. How the rest of human history will play out has not yet been revealed. But, for us who believe, the Day of the Lord is already here. *Our victory* is already assured.