

Advent 1 B – 30 November 2008

LESSON: God Fulfills His Promises

As human beings – our nature has great potential, AND great limitations – and God knows these limitations very well - after all, he **created** us.

- ? We all *claim* to be able to multi-task, but every time I talk to someone on the phone and try to type at the same time – they always say, “What are you doing?” “Oh, nothing” is the reply as I quickly re-focus my attention.
- ? It reminds me that we can only focus our attention - really **focus** it - on one, *maybe* two things at a time; we can't keep **everything** in mind all at once.
- ? But on the other hand, we can't focus our attention on the **same** thing all the time either; we need **variety**, otherwise we become depressed.

These limitations of our human nature are one reason God inspired the Church to divide the year into **liturgical seasons**.

The mystery of our salvation includes the whole **Bible**, the whole **life of Christ**, and the whole **history** of the Church.

But we can't possibly keep **all** those things in mind **all** the time.

So we focus on **different aspects** of them at **different times** of the year (which has the added benefit of giving **variety** to our spiritual lives):

- ? in **Lent** we focus on the reality of sin and mercy and the need for repentance;
- ? during **Easter** we focus on the power of God and the Resurrection;
- ? during **Ordinary Time** we focus on the everyday life and teachings of Christ and the wisdom they impart for **our** everyday lives;
- ? and now, during Advent, we focus on **God's faithfulness** and the Hope the Christ brings.

St Paul puts it briefly in today's Second Reading: "God is faithful."

- ? God didn't **abandon** the human race after original sin.
- ? He promised to send a **Savior**, and he **fulfilled** his promise on the very first **Christmas**.
- ? And God has also **promised** that this Savior, Jesus Christ, **will come again** to bring our **earthly exile** to its completion,
- ? just as in Old Testament times God brought his Chosen People out of their **exile in Babylon**, as today's First Reading reminded us.

God is faithful; he will fulfill his promises and His faithfulness is the reason for our hope. That's really one of the **key themes** for Advent.

ILLUSTRATION: Multiple Symbols in the Advent Wreath

Maybe the most familiar and universal symbol of this beautiful truth is the **Advent wreath with its four candles**, which Christians have been using for more than **1000 years**.

- ? Its **circular shape** gives it no beginning or end - perfectly symbolizing the **eternity** of God and his love, and the **everlasting life** that Christ wants to give all of us.
- ? The different types of branches traditionally used in Advent wreaths are all from **evergreen trees**, trees that remain green even during the coldest, darkest days of winter.
- ? They remind us that **Christ's love remains fresh and strong** even in life's most difficult moments - he **never abandons** us.
- ? Traditional wreaths included **laurel** and **holly** branches.
- ? The laurel branch was an ancient symbol of **victory**; it reminds us that on the **first Christmas** Christ came to bring **victory** over sin and Satan.
- ? The **holly** branches are bordered with small, **prickly** edges, reminding us of **Christ's crown of thorns**, of the **suffering** by which he won his victory over sin and evil.
- ? The **four candles** represent the four weeks of Advent.
- ? Some traditions also say that they represent the **four thousand years** that Christians used to believe passed between the Fall of Adam and Eve and the Birth of Jesus.
- ? Their **light** represents **Christ himself**, who is the light of the world: his **Word** shows us how we should live, and his **love**, expressed especially in the Eucharist, fills our hearts with **comfort**, like the warmth of a supernatural fire.
- ? We light the candles **gradually** throughout Advent, because we know that the **joy of salvation** doesn't come fully into our lives all at once.
- ? Rather, life as a Christian is a **journey**, a relationship with Jesus that has to be **constantly renewed**, just as a new candle is lit each week.
- ? If we are faithful to this friendship and don't abandon our journey, the fullness of joy will eventually be ours.

Christ has **promised** us all of this, and he wants us to **rejoice** in these promises, confident that since he is faithful, he **can** and **will** fulfill them.

APPLICATION: Waking up to Advent

I believe that there is a great danger in Advent – but that danger is not from Advent itself, but from us – that we **IGNORE** it!

St. Mark warns us in today's Gospel to say alter – awake – for the Lord's coming.

But, might I suggest, most of us are asleep, **SOUND** asleep!

I used to have terrible trouble falling asleep at the wheel as I drove my car

- ? I was in too much of a hurry or

? I was too proud to admit that I could do it and needed a break.

I think that's all of US in Advent

- ? We're sound asleep
- ? On "autopilot" headed straight to Christmas
- ? But we're missing all that Advent offers us!

Advent is a time

- ? to renew our hope (as the Advent wreath says on it today)
- ? to realize the patterns – the bad patterns – that have crept in
- ? Advent is a time to renew our Hope in the promises made to our ancestors.

So often people wonder where God is (as we heard in the 1st reading today from Isaiah). So we cry, "God, where are you?" But it's not God who left us, but WE who have "fallen asleep at the wheel."

Don't like where the world is today? Don't like where the world seems to be headed? We have no one to blame but ourselves! We fell asleep and

- ? allowed the few who are "offended" by our God to tell us we can't pray to Him publicly
- ? or put the manger in the town square
- ? or that we should keep our morality in church and out of their bedrooms
- ? and most certainly out of politics.

We've fallen asleep! WAKE UP! This is what Advent is for – to realize our errors, the pride, the belief that "I can do it myself."

Advent is time to be renewed in the hope of Peace that only Christ brings.

Stop multitasking! Wake up! Pay attention! Focus on Christ and the hope that He gives.