

First Sunday of Advent
December 2, 2018
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Reflection

When you're expecting someone to visit, you turn on the front light. Maybe not in the summer, when it stays bright until bedtime. But in the winter, you want to show that your guest is expected. They're welcome and you're lighting their path. They're anticipated and you've prepared for their arrival. Switching on the light is a sign that you're ready to receive them.

Before Mass began, we started the new liturgical year. We blessed the Advent wreath and lit the first candle. It's like turning on the front light when it's dark outside, and you're expecting someone. There is a darkness surrounding the Church. The legacy of abuse that was uncovered this past summer shows that the holiness of the Church is imperfect. But in this darkness, we are expecting someone. The Church is longing for Jesus. We're like the people of Israel who had waited for the Messiah as well. God promised the arrival of the Son of David who would restore unity and peace. He made the promise through Jeremiah at the darkest of times. The Assyrians had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel one hundred years earlier. Now Jerusalem had fallen, and its leaders were exiled to Babylon. The city and its temple would soon be destroyed. It was dark and getting darker. But it was also the hour for God to renew his promise through his prophet.

Jer 33:14-16
Ps 25
1 Thes 3:12-4:2
Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

"In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." God lit a beacon with these words. The people of Israel would cling to them until John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29)."

Turning on the front light shows that your guest is expected, and also that they're welcome. Maybe it's hard to want to welcome Jesus, since the end of the age will be frightening. "People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." It's easier if we start to welcome Jesus now. He is present within the Church, and miracles are still happening. You can read about them each time the Pope canonizes another saint. Jesus is with us until the end of age (Mt 28:20). He is present when the priest proclaims the Gospel, where two or three are gathered in his name. He is with us in the Eucharist. Our Christian life is a lesson in welcoming Jesus, so that "when these things begin to take place, [you will] stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

We expect Jesus, we welcome him and we prepare for him. When a guest is coming, you might prepare for their arrival. You clean the house and make a dinner. We prepare ourselves for Jesus by every decision that we make.

Listen to what Paul told the Thessalonians: "as you learned from us how you ought to live and please God, as, in fact you are doing, you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus." Archbishop Prendergast has given some instructions on how to prepare ourselves for Christmas during this Advent season. You can go to confession before Mass or at the reconciliation service on December 12. Commit to reading an Advent reflection each day. Get an Advent calendar and see what each day brings. Set up a creche, and move the wise men closer as the season moves towards Christmas. Make a special donation towards those in need. The Archbishop says, "You will be blessed if you make a little space in your crowded life to welcome the Christ-child into your heart and home."

We're up before the sun, and it's dark when you get home from work. Advent is a season of darkness, but the gloom is punctuated by a thousand points of light. These lights are the work of the Holy Spirit. They're a sign that we are welcoming Jesus into our hearts, so that we can receive him when he comes again.