

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

BEGIN

Let your heart prepare him room.

PRAY

Would that you might meet us doing right, that we
were mindful of you in our ways!

~Isaiah 64:4a

LISTEN

Read Mark 13: 33–37.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You
do not know when the time will come.”

~Mark 13:33

Returning God’s Love

The head of a company I once worked for vacationed for several weeks each year. His office door was left open, and the lights were on every day of his absence. He was in many ways a benign employer, but—whatever he intended—the open door and the glowing lights implied that employees should be on their toes because the boss might return at any minute.

Some employees may have acted responsibly for that reason, and some may have done so to protect their livelihoods. Most would have been on their toes whether the boss was on the premises or not—because they took pride in their work or because they thought it was the right thing to do.

Now consider today's gospel passage. Although Jesus' remarks are often interpreted to mean that folks should avoid sin because they could die at any time and face God while in an embarrassing condition, we can interpret his message in a more constructive way, and especially during the season of Advent. During Advent, we anticipate our celebration of the birth of Jesus, the event in which God appeared in history in the form of a human being. God did not appear in this way to frighten humanity into submission. Rather, through this act of unconditional love, God provided us with a way to intimacy with the Divine, and that way was Jesus' Gospel of love, charity, and justice, and the example of his life of compassion and humility.

Advent reminds us to measure the large and small decisions that we make every day by the standard of his teaching and his example. Refreshed by this season, we can continue striving for that ideal, not because we're afraid to be caught off guard, but because we want to return the love that God gave us in Jesus.

A C T

This evening, I will take a few moments to reflect on how my decisions and actions today reflected what Jesus taught.

P R A Y

Lord Jesus Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, may I reflect your teaching and your example in every detail of my everyday life and especially in those actions that affect the lives of others. Amen.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

BEGIN

Let your heart prepare him room.

PRAY

Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I ask, did they not hear? Certainly they did; for "Their voice has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

~Romans 10:17-18a

LISTEN

Read Matthew 4:18-22.

Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

~Matthew 4:19-20

Start Spreading the News

A parishioner came to the sacristy after Mass one Sunday morning and asked me if I had a copy of an earlier homily. He said that I had preached it about six months before, and that the homily concerned a scripture passage he found difficult. He wanted to read again what I had said about it.

I searched my computer and found the homily, which I had actually preached about two-and-a-half years before, and the next time I saw the man I gave him a copy. When I handed it to him, he looked me in

the eye and said, “You think we don’t listen, don’t you?” The incident reminded me that we preachers should be acutely aware that people *do* listen to what we say.

In fact, all Catholics should take this question to heart when we interact with Catholics and non-Catholics alike. All Catholics are commissioned by virtue of our baptism to carry on the ministry of St. Andrew the apostle, whose feast we celebrate today. The mission is to carry with us the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever we go.

One tradition has it that St. Andrew preached the Gospel all around the Black Sea; another holds that he preached in Scotland. We don’t have to travel that far to spread the Good News, and Advent provides us with a special opportunity to do so wherever we go with whomever we meet.

People will listen to us when we greet them during this season. Let them hear in the joy and warmth of our greeting that what we are preparing to celebrate is not the annual retail bonanza but the birth of Jesus, the one whose message of peace and love can still transform the world.

A C T

I will let others know as I greet them today that I am eager to celebrate the birth of my Savior.

P R A Y

Dear Jesus, may my faith in you and my devotion to the Gospel guide everything that I say, and may nothing I say deny that you are Lord of my life. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

BEGIN

Let your heart prepare him room.

PRAY

There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea.

~Isaiah 11:9

LISTEN

Read Luke 10:21–24.

Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.”

~Luke 10:21

First Things First

My grandson, age four, and granddaughter, age two, were discussing the use of a toy—a dialogue in which the word “mine” played a frequent and critical part. Their mother told the little girl to let her brother have his turn, to which he added, “Yes. That’s called ‘sharing’!”

We’re often surprised when a young child makes a remark like that, but sometimes kids, whose lives are relatively simple, see more clearly than adults whose minds are cluttered with schemes and desires.

For centuries, scholars have studied the teachings of Jesus and worked to explain them further. Most of us

don't have the time or the academic background to delve into the works of those philosophers and theologians, nor do we need to. After all, Jesus didn't teach out of textbooks; he talked to people in language they could understand and illustrated his teaching with stories drawn from the culture of that place and time.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus addresses a group of disciples who have returned from a successful missionary journey during which, we can imagine, they spread his teaching much as he had done. Jesus' comment to those disciples that what the Father had hidden "from the wise and learned" he had revealed "to the childlike" didn't mean that scholarship is useless or that faith-filled people are naïve.

Rather, it means that even before we study divine mysteries, we should commit ourselves completely to Jesus, the Son of God, making him the center of our lives. It means that we should make every other pursuit secondary to our most important pursuit—the one Jesus expressed as "the greatest commandment"—a daily life motivated by love of God and love of each other. And that's clear enough for a child to understand.

ACT

I will intentionally do a small act of patience, kindness, and generosity today, and thank God for making clear to me Jesus' commandment of love.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, help me to recognize each opportunity to live your commandment to love God and my fellow human beings unconditionally. May I always be attentive to the needs of others and help, comfort, or encourage them as though I were doing it for you. Amen.