

Homily112920

CHRISTMAS IS COMING BUT IT IS CHRIST DRAWS NEAR

“What’s on your mind? How can I help you?” I often ask people these two questions when there is a request to meet with me. “What’s on your mind? What are you concerned about? What are you grappling with?” Because we do have things on our minds and we do grapple with things. Perhaps especially right now. We human beings think about things. We ponder. We muse. We consider. We speculate. We worry. We ask about. We wonder. And sometimes we grow fearful.

Every year around this time the believing community begins a new liturgical season called Advent. Our Church and our faith in Jesus Christ tells us that it is a time of preparation, a time for reminders, a time for the refocusing of our attention. We transition from the ordinary concerns that we spend most of our time with to the more important and more ultimate concerns we sometimes avoid thinking about. Yes, Christmas is coming—as it does every year on December 25th. And yes we must get ready. But more importantly, Christ is coming. And that date—well, we don’t know that date. And because we don’t, Our Lord gave us some advice to heed. “Be watchful,” he says. “Stay alert!” “Live your life with your eyes wide open!”

In the Sacristy where the priest puts on his vestments to celebrate Mass there is a large plaque on the wall. It reads:

Priest of God, celebrate this Mass
--as if it were your first Mass
--as if it were your last Mass
--as if it were your only Mass.

I read it each time. It reminds me. It focuses my attention. It centers me for what I am about to celebrate. For I remember my first Mass and all that I brought to that occasion. And I know that there will one day be another Mass which will actually be the last Mass I celebrate. And if at the end of today the Lord comes to call me home then this is my only Mass.

My friends, you get the idea. Mindfulness. Focus. Appreciation. Centeredness. But I believe the message of Jesus is not just to priests as they are about to celebrate the Eucharist. I believe it applies to us, each of us, each day. Can you hear Jesus say to you?

My beloved disciple and friend, live this day
--as if it were your first day on earth
--as if it were your last day on earth
--as if it were your only day on earth.

This day actually is the only day we have. There is no guarantee of a tomorrow. We plan as if we have pretty much unlimited time but actually there is a very definite limit to the amount of time we have allotted to us. I have lived on this earth way more than 26,000 days. Who knows how many are left to me? Don’t waste time. Don’t fritter it away. Don’t use it carelessly or

frivolously. It is a gift, this time we have on earth. Use the gift wisely. That is the message of Jesus.

My friends, listen to the people crying out in the words of Isaiah the prophet over 2500 years ago. “Lord, would that you would rend the heavens and come down.” The people of Israel were in exile, away from their homeland—again. They had failed to serve the Lord—again. They had given themselves over to their selfishness and sinful ways—again. And they had come to their senses and asked for forgiveness—again. Now they are crying out to their God. “Please come to us. Rend the heavens and come down.” Remember when Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River? As he emerged from the waters the skies were torn open and the Spirit descended in the form of a dove and God spoke a word of consecration: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.” Did not God rend the heavens in that moment?

God heard his people’s cry. God sent his Son. God tore open the heavens and came to earth. To be with his people. That is the person of Jesus. Who was conceived of the Virgin Mary, born as we all are born, grew to maturity, taught, healed, performed mighty works, raised the dead, suffered and died—for us. And was raised on the third day. It is his coming we celebrate at Christmas. But it is his next coming that we must take seriously. And be alert for.

If you and I live mindfully, with attention, reverence and devotion, even during this coronavirus, we will not miss when Jesus approaches this day. We will be attentive. We will recognize his grace in a particular moment (even as we hear these words right now). Jesus has taught us that living on this earth is all about—the Way. The way we see. The way we think. The way we act. The way we love. The way we choose to believe what He says, trusting in his word more than we trust in the way we see things or have seen them; or the way we hear things or have heard them; or the way we have done things or experienced them.

Right now a lot of us are not really feeling good. And it bothers us. Things are serious. There is a good deal of fear. Not much laughter. But life is about more than feeling good. Life is about doing the good. Life is about being good. And that only happens with the grace made available to us in and through Jesus Christ. So when Our Lord says to us: “Stay awake. Look at what you are doing.” It is imperative we take his word seriously and decide to change whatever in us needs to change. If we need forgiveness or cannot forgive another then head to the Sacrament and seek God’s mercy. That is a very Advent thing to do. And it places us mindfully and firmly—on His Way.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.