

ADVENT: THE BEGINNING OF AN ADVENTURE

I do not remember when the realization dawned on me but somewhere in my past I began to realize that I was becoming a good pray-er. I have always prayed. Praying came pretty readily to me even as a youngster. For the years in the seminary I gave myself to the various prayer assignments presented to us. I remember a Retreat that was given to us by Venerable Fulton J. Sheen. One of the things he encouraged was a daily holy hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Daily. He spoke about how it changed his own life and his relationship with Our Lord. I began to do that. For most of my years as a priest I have done a daily Holy Hour and many of those years before the Blessed Sacrament, especially here at Saint Anthony's.

At times I am told by people that they don't know how to pray. My counsel is always the same. Pray from where you are. Where is your heart? What is going on in your heart? Start there. What is weighing heavily upon you? What makes you anxious or gives rise to fears? Bring that to Our Lord. Ask him to remove or transform or heal or strengthen or bless. Whatever your heart cries out for. Start there.

This is Advent. There is a very simple Advent prayer. You all know it. It is simply this: Come Lord Jesus! Come Lord Jesus! Pray that. Pray that today. Pray that every day. Pray that throughout the day. It may seem like it is so insignificant that it makes no difference. But it does. It makes all the difference in the world.

Listen to this story from the life of Saint John Vianney, the Cure of Ars. He is the patron saint of parish priests.

A widow, desperate because her husband had committed suicide by throwing himself into a river, came to Ars and met Saint John as he was leaving the Church. He bent toward her and told her: 'He is saved.' Her face asked how this could be. But Saint John insisted, 'I tell you he is saved. He is in purgatory and you must pray for him. Between the parapet of the bridge and the water below, he had time to make an act of repentance. It is the Blessed Virgin who obtained this grace for him. Remember the shrine to Mary in your bedroom? Sometimes your husband, although irreligious, united himself to your prayer. That merited repentance and the supreme pardon for him.'

The widow later stated: 'I was in a dreadful state of despair imagining the tragic end of my husband. He was an unbeliever and I lived only for the thought of leading him back to God.... Yet yesterday Father Vianney told me: 'He is saved!' "I shall see him again in heaven after all.'

The one telling this story adds these words. *'See the delicacy of Jesus and Mary. A person did some good which he had forgotten, but they had not forgotten, and at the right moment they made use of it. Jesus makes use of everything to save us. How astonished we will be in heaven when we see all that! Some make him a judge who strikes men down and seeks revenge, whereas in fact he seeks to save us by all possible means.'*

He goes on to say: *'I insist: Hold fast, always with the same tenacity, hold fast to an immense confidence. Often Our Lord hides from the apostle the fruit of his work, the fruit of his fatigue, in order to keep him humble and to test his faith, by a totally divine wisdom. Learn how to say: I do not expect my reward here below. Even if you do not see the result of your prayers, of your supplications, of your efforts, I tell you: Believe! Believe!'*

My friends, the Old Testament is full of promises that God has made over the centuries. They all pointed to Jesus, the Day of the Lord, when the Son of Man who come upon the earth. We call that day Christmas. The Advent season is given to us by the Church each year as an early Christmas gift. So we can prepare ourselves to celebrate the fulfillment of those promises. But the Lord desires to fulfill the requests that issue from our hearts too. Right now. So pray from your heart today. And each day of Advent. Pray simply the way believers have prayed for millennia. Come Lord Jesus! Come to my spouse! Come to my children! Come to me! Come to all I love! Come into our world! Come Lord Jesus!

And when you do this Advent will be transformed too. Into an Adventure.

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