

Deacon Steve Szmuto's Reflection on the Sunday Readings
December 1, 2019 - First Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 2: 1-5 Psalm 122: 1-9 Romans 13: 11-14
Matthew 24: 37-44

“Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.”
(Matthew 24: 42)

Today, we begin the Season of Advent, a time of repentance and preparation for the Birth of the Messiah, and the beginning of the 2020 Liturgical year. It is a good time to reacquaint ourselves with the significance of the season and its symbolism.

The word Advent is a word taken from Latin, meaning “the coming.” The longer term, “*Adventus Redemptoris*,” means, “the coming of the Savior.” Over the next four weeks, the readings reflect the anticipation of the Messiah, the coming of Jesus Christ, both in the fullness of his humanity two thousands years ago, and in his divinity at the end of time. Purple vestments are used throughout Advent, a sign of penance. One of the most visible and enduring symbols of Advent, both in the Church and at home, is the Advent Wreath. Traditionally crafted of evergreens (a sign of everlasting life), the wreath is decorated with three purple candles and one rose candle, the latter first used on the third Sunday of Advent. One candle is lit on the First Sunday of Advent and one additional candle is lit each successive Sunday, symbolizing the coming of the Savior -- the light of the world. As the wreath is blessed and lit on the First Sunday of Advent, the celebrant prays in these or similar words: “*May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation. May he come quickly and not delay.*”

The Third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudete Sunday*, a term which means “rejoice”; on that day, the rose (or pink) vestments will be worn by the priest and deacon and the rose candle is lit. The rose color is used only twice in the Liturgical year – on this Sunday and on the fourth Sunday of Lent, known as *Laetare Sunday* -- a sign of joyful hope and anticipation, even amidst a time of penance and preparation.

Too often, the significance of Advent is lost amidst the preparations for our secular celebration of Christmas. Rather than focus on the importance of Christ's nativity into a world made weary by sin, many of us embrace the frenetic pace of a holiday season, where the dollar reigns supreme and love can mistakenly be measured by the price of our gifts, rather than by the inestimable value of our love.

As we gather today to celebrate the Sacred Eucharist, the eternal and enduring gift of Jesus' Precious Body and Blood, let us take a few moments each day to reflect in joyful anticipation of the birth of our Lord. In the peace of grateful prayer and devotion, we can turn our hearts away from the matters of this world -- if only for a few blessed moments -- and prepare ourselves to welcome the Lord with gladness at the most sacred celebration of the Nativity.

“For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand.” (Romans 13: 11b-12a)

Deacon Steve Szmuto