

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today begins the Season of Advent. This is a time of waiting and expectation as well as anticipating the coming of Jesus Christ into our human experience. This is a special liturgical season which affords us all the opportunity to reflect of Christ's presence in our lives and to renew our commitment to Christian living. It is difficult to fathom that it is already nearing the end of the year. There have been so many times lately when I have found myself asking the question, "Where did the year go?" Granted, this has been a most unusual and extraordinary year. In a very real sense, this year has brought into very close view the reality that life is indeed a time of seasons, a season of gain and loss, of life and death, of hope amidst difficulties and trials of life. I recognize that for many people the effects of the pandemic have brought hardship and pain; I know Father Coleman, Father Edgardo and myself have spent a lot of time listening to and offering spiritual support to friends and parishioners who have been profoundly impacted by this crisis.

I believe that these past several months have prepared us for the liturgical season we now celebrate. In a physical way, the bright light of summer gives way to the dimming of that light in autumn. Now we enter into days wherein it gets darker earlier and the air becomes colder and chillier. It is against the backdrop of these elements that we ponder the necessity for shelter and warmth both in a physical but as well as a spiritual way. As we dwell within the confines of our spiritual home, who provides the shelter and who brings warmth and safety to us amidst the harshness of the elements? Ultimately, it is Jesus Christ who offers us sure support of shelter and light, and this Advent Season helps to prepare for his indwelling among the human family.

A few weeks ago I celebrated Tuesday evening Mass at Church of the Nativity in Menlo Park. As I was driving to Mass, I was thinking about this time of year and the changing of times and seasons. It was both fitting and ironic, then, that the Gospel reading that evening spoke to this experience of waiting and anticipation for the coming of the Master. Are we disposed to be ready and vigilant when he comes to us? "Jesus said to his disciples: 'Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants.'" [Luke: 12: 35-38].

This Sunday's Gospel from Mark echoes this same sentiment which Jesus expressed in Luke's Gospel. Jesus extolled his disciples to be watchful and alert. Thus, this Season of Advent invites us to watch for the coming of the Lord. Our own vigilance to prayer and celebrating the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church helps us in that very preparation. Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9 expresses some of the "tools" we need in the spiritual life in order to be attentive and vigilant for the Lord's coming. "I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony in Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. God gives us the gift of intellect to reflect upon and ponder the both the mysteries of life as well as the truth revealed to us by Scripture and the traditions of the Church. As we reflect upon the Scriptures, we can easily grasp the message of Jesus Christ by the simple and identifiable language and images he uses to reveal the truth. We know what it means to be watchful and alert. We also understand the meaning of time. Despite how much of our lives is governed by finite time, all things ultimately are done on God's time.

As we enter into this holy Season of Advent, I invite each of us, especially our families, to pray together. Please make use of the Advent Calendar and the Advent Wreath as opportunities to teach our children and young people about the Catholic faith. Praying together and celebrating these timeless traditions of the Church will help us all to strengthen our desire and ability to be watchful and alert!

Fr. Tom