



Advent 2023 Reflections from the Bishops of the Archdiocese of Seattle

1st Sunday of Advent—reflection from Archbishop Etienne

Prepare ... for an alert way of life

In the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent, Mark gives us the final words of Jesus prior to the beginning of his account of the Passion. *Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.* (Mark 13:33)

Advent calls us to prepare for and reflect upon our need for our Savior, Jesus Christ. Advent calls us to the wisdom that knows much more is at stake than our worldly existence. Advent alerts us to a clarity of vision regarding things eternal and to prepare ourselves so we don't succumb to worldly ways. The evangelist St. Luke puts these final words on the lips of Jesus prior to his Passion account:

Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21: 34-36)

It is precisely preparing for such an "alert way of life" that Christ is calling us this Advent season. We hear much in our day about "secularism" and the "New Evangelization." But what exactly do this mean?

Secularism is a philosophy of life which rejects God and rejects any attempts on the part of believers to insert their faith and morals into public discourse, politics or legislation.

The New Evangelization is our response to secularism. It is our opportunity, our mandate, to re-proclaim Christ to a culture and world that formerly considered itself Christian. The New Evangelization is a renewal of our effort to "Go out to all the world and proclaim the Good News," to bring Christ to our people, and to bring our people to Christ. It is the mission of the Church.

Advent calls us to be honest about the values and beliefs that we hold because of cultural convenience, rather than the values and beliefs dear to our faith. We must be alert to the many cultural messages that reinforce a relative view of Truth.

Let me be very clear: We as Catholic Christians believe in an Absolute Truth, and that Absolute Truth is found in and preached by Jesus Christ. It is this Truth that underlies our Christian values and beliefs. This is the Truth we are called to live and bring to the public forum. The death many people face today is a moral death, and the only remedy is Christ and the life which only He brings.

Advent is our call to "Wake up!" to prepare the way of the Lord in our lives, to prepare our hearts and reflect on how we live our life. It is time to not only draw a line in the sand, but to reclaim lost ground in the culture war for moral values and Truth.

1st Sunday of Advent reflection questions:

1. "Advent is our call to 'wake up.'" In what ways do I need to "wake up" this Advent in order to live my faith more fully?
2. Jesus is the Truth. I believe Jesus is the Truth – do I live by his truth, or do other philosophies dictate my priorities?
3. The Advent season calls us to prepare the way of the Lord, in our heart and our ways, to an "alert way of life." How are you planning to prepare your ways and heart this Advent? Share your thoughts and listen and be inspired by others.
4. "Advent calls us to be honest about the values and beliefs that we hold because of cultural convenience, rather than the values and beliefs dear to our faith" (Archbishop Etienne). What "culturally convenient" values and beliefs do I hold? Can I let go of those values this Advent and let myself be guided by Jesus?

2nd Sunday of Advent—reflection from Bishop Schuster

Prepare ... for the coming of the Lord

What is the spirituality of Advent? The word Advent means "arrival" or "coming." It is a season of keeping vigil, of preparing, for the arrival of the Messiah. St. Cyril of Jerusalem writing in the fourth century summarizes this spirituality beautifully: "We do not preach only one coming of Christ, but a second as well, much more glorious than the first. The first coming was marked by patience; the second coming will bring the crown of a divine kingdom."

I mention this because these themes are on display this year on the Second Sunday of Advent. Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Lord God, who will rule by his strong arm and will bring comfort and redemption to Israel. In the Gospel, St. John the Baptist appears as the messenger prophesied by Isaiah who would announce the coming of the Lord. In the second reading from St. Peter, we have a very clear reference to the second coming. The day of the Lord will come like a thief when the heavens and earth will pass away. St. Peter writes to us, "since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace."

Although we can do well by sticking with these two themes, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, writing in the 12th century argues, "We know that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. It is invisible, while the other two are visible. The first coming he was seen on earth, dwelling among men; he himself testified that they saw him and hated him. In the final coming all flesh will see the salvation of our God and they will look on him whom they pierced. The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect who see the Lord within their own selves and they are saved."

What St. Bernard is suggesting is profound. During this season of Advent, should we call to mind the first coming of our Lord on Christmas morning? Yes! Should we call to mind the second coming of the Lord at the end of time? Yes!

To stop there, however, may be inadequate, unless we realize that Christ is also present to us and to the world around us through our baptism and the sacraments of the Church, most especially in the Holy Eucharist. Christ is present in the world today because we are called to become what we eat, as baptized believers in the Body of Christ. Indeed, the Gospel of Mark begins on the Second Sunday of Advent with the testimony of St. John the Baptist precisely because his life pointed to Jesus.

2nd Sunday of Advent reflection questions:

1. St. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and prepared his way. How can I prepare the way of the Lord in my life, in my family, in my workplace?
2. What are some of the traditional preparations you make to celebrate Christmas, the first coming of Jesus? What preparations can we make for the second coming of Jesus?
3. Between the first and second comings of Jesus, St. Bernard wrote, was a “hidden one”: even now, Jesus comes to us in the sacraments. How do I prepare for and welcome this “hidden coming” of Jesus?
4. What are concrete ways you can prepare yourself for the arrival of Jesus Christ, on Christmas morning, at the end of time, and in the present as baptized believers in the Body of Christ?

3rd Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)—reflection from Bishop Elizondo

Prepare ... for the joyful wait for our countryman, Jesus

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (Jn. 1:14).

This week, we continue to prepare ourselves for the joyful wait for Jesus, who historically came to our land 20 centuries ago and continues to come today in the hearts of believers.

Two thousand years ago, our humanity discovered the ultimate meaning of existence thanks to the Incarnation of the Word of God, who became our countryman in Jesus. However, Jesus was treated as a foreigner and still is to many in our world. The bombs, deaths, and destruction continue to happen even in the King of Peace’s earthly cradle.

Members of the same land recognize each other by speaking the same language, by our features and customs. Jesus said they would recognize us as his disciples because of the love between us. That love is what makes us his family.

This Advent, Jesus continues to plow and shape the land of our hearts, which belongs to him, but in which he desires to be freely received as family and not as an intruder. Jesus came, comes, and will continue to come to this world every time someone in his name welcomes another in need. Jesus continues to come when we ask for forgiveness by acknowledging having hurt the unity of the human family. Jesus will continue to come every time a man or woman discovers, in the eyes of another, a brother or sister, overcoming barriers of ancestral resentment and selfishness.

This Gaudete Sunday and third week of Advent, we joyfully say to Jesus:

- Welcome, Countryman! Prepare our hearts, our ways, our lives for you!
- Thank you for making yourself one of us, thereby making us one of yours.
- Thank you for teaching us with your work as a carpenter that the sweat of the skin ennobles the fruit of our hands.
- Thank you for showing us that the greatest love is to give your life for your friends, as you did.
- Thank you for your patience and forgiveness that gives us the tools to stop revenge.
- Thank you for giving us your Body and Blood to strengthen us and persevere against everything that denigrates the greatness and human dignity you took, making it seem disposable in abortion, euthanasia, and wars which divide family, relatives and friends.

- Your presence, Jesus, is the joyful Light that makes us see the stains and dirt of the beautiful human family in which you wanted to be born and in which you want us to aspire to the royalty to which we belong beyond the earthly.
- Thank you for all the men and women who have followed in your footsteps and served as close models for us.

Mary, to you we say : Thank you for your purity, handmaid of the Lord, who captivated your own Creator, overcoming the impossible with your faith until you brought us a countryman on this earth, Jesus, who wants to make his permanent residence here, walking with us towards the ultimate homeland.

3rd Sunday of Advent reflection questions:

1. What areas in your life do you need to better prepare to welcome Jesus, the divine countryman, into your life and heart this Advent?
2. Re-read all the ways to be thankful to Jesus today. What's one thing you can do today to be more intentionally joyful and thankful to Jesus?
3. "Gaudete" means "rejoice." What gives me cause to rejoice at this time?
4. How do I welcome Jesus in the poor? How do I welcome Jesus in those who are different from me? How do I welcome Jesus through forgiveness and reconciliation?