

**The First Sunday in Advent:** In this First Sunday of Advent, Jesus explains that no one knows the time of the Second Coming, therefore we should always be prepared. It is also a reminder that there is less than one month before the arrival of Christmas. To others, it means that the rush is on to put twinkling lights around the house, to shop for gifts, and to buy food for the family Christmas table. To others yet, it means making peace with relatives so that all may enjoy a wonderful family Christmas meal as Christ intended it to be. At the same time, the teachings of the Catholic Church also show that Advent means three things: (1) to prepare ourselves to be worthy of the Lord's coming into the world as the incarnate God of love, (2) to prepare our souls as fitting abodes for the coming Redeemer through the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and (3) to ready ourselves for the final coming of the Lord as our Judge, either at our individual death or at the end of the world, whichever may come first.

The Readings for the First Sunday should prepare us to be spiritually uplifted according to these three goals of the season. The Gospel tells us to be on our guard so our hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, so the day of the Lord will not catch us unexpectedly. Therefore, Divine wisdom tells us that we should always be prepared. We should immediately be prepared in case the Lord calls us tonight during our sleep. Before our bedtime tonight, if anything needs to be done, it must be completed. For there may be no tomorrow. To be fully prepared, we must walk with the Holy Spirit who disciplines and sanctifies us to increase our holiness. We must do all what is humanly possible to continually remain in communion with God on a daily basis.

**The Second Sunday in Advent:** John the Baptist preaches repentance to prepare for the coming of the Lord. The spiritual message behind the Readings of the Second Sunday of Advent is that we should continue to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ in our lives. In the Gospel (Lk. 3:1-6), we hear John saying: ***"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth: and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."***

For this week, let us reflect upon how we are preparing to celebrate the coming of the Lord on Christmas day. Have we prepared ourselves to appear before the Lord should death suddenly come upon us? What if the world was to end today, and Jesus stands at the gate, are we prepared to face this great moment? Let us, each according to our own spiritual needs, embrace the necessary steps to ensure that we have prepared ourselves for whatever may come in our lives so the glory of God may be made manifest through our humble obedience and service.

**The Third Sunday in Advent:** Here, John explains that he is not the Messiah, but as in the past two weeks, the readings continue to focus on preparedness and preparation for the coming of the Lord. John also lays down the path to holiness which basically involves sharing our blessings with those who have little or nothing. Holiness is not judgmental! It is full of compassion! It reaches out to those in need regardless of who they are and where they may be.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist states that the One who is coming will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire. Baptism by fire means to be sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit so

that we may become holy children of God. Unless we are sanctified, we cannot enter Heaven; for Heaven is the home of those who are pure, gentle, humble and obedient, those who share with the needy.

**The Fourth Sunday in Advent:** The angel Gabriel explains to Mary that even though she is a virgin, she will give birth to the Son of God. In the Gospel we see Mary as she enters the house of Zechariah and is greeted by Elizabeth, in words inspired by the Holy Spirit, while the child in her womb leaps for joy.

In both cases, a spiritual manifestation came forth from those who were touched by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Equally, the coming of Jesus in the world should touch our lives. From us should come forth the living water so it may flow freely towards our brothers and sisters in the love of Christ. As Elizabeth and John the Baptist expressed great joy in the presence of the Lord, so also should we be expressing great joy.

**Feast of the Holy Family:** The Feast of the Holy Family appropriately closes the year. It is a time to review our lives as a family, that with the coming of a New Year, we may take the opportunity to address and correct our mistakes and weaknesses. This day should also provide us with the opportunity to review the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding "the nature of the family."

What then is a Christian family? "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church." (LG 11) It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament (Eph. 5:21-6:4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Pet. 3:1-7) and CCC No. 2204. "The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task." (CCC No. 2205)

What about the role of the family in society? "The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society." (CCC No. 2207)

"The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society (GS 47.1) entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family. Civil authority should consider it a grave duty 'to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality, and promote domestic prosperity.'" (GS 52.2) and (CCC No. 2210)

These summarize in part the meaning of a holy family that makes its home in the Lord Jesus. Through this Feast of the Holy Family, let us ask the Heavenly Father to help us to live as a family that is holy, united in respect and love. Let us ask Him to bring us to the joy and peace of our eternal home ★★