

1-page Summary: Advent I (Dec 2) Homily on Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

Central theme: Advent is a time of waiting for Christ, allowing Jesus to be reborn in our lives. It is also a time for purifying our hearts by repentance and for renewing our lives by reflecting on and experiencing the several comings (advents) of Christ into our lives. Besides his first coming at his birth, Jesus comes to our lives through the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), through the Word of God, through the worshipping community, at the moment of our death and, finally, in his *Second Coming* to judge the world.

Scripture lessons summarized: In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah waits and hopes for an ideal descendant of King David who will bring security, peace and justice to God's people. Christians believe that Jeremiah's waiting and hoping were fulfilled in Jesus. Jeremiah assures us that *the Lord our justice* will fulfill His promises, and, hence, we need not be afraid in spite of the frightening events and moral degradation all around. The Psalmist expresses the central idea of patient, vigilant and prayerful waiting for the Lord in today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 25), asking Him to make known His ways to us, guide us, and teach us. In the second reading, Paul gives instructions about how Christians should conduct themselves as they wait for "*the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His holy ones.*" We are advised to "*strengthen our hearts in holiness*" (3:13) and "*abound in love for one another*" (3:12). In today's Gospel, Jesus prophesies the signs and portents that will accompany his *Second Coming* and encourages us to be expectant, optimistic, vigilant and well-prepared: "*When these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand*" (Luke 21:28). Jesus wants us to face the future with confidence in God's providence.

Life messages: 1) We need to prepare ourselves for Christ's second coming by allowing Jesus to be reborn daily in our lives. Advent is the time for us to make this preparation by repenting for our sins, by renewing our lives through prayer and penance and by sharing our blessings with others. Advent also provides an opportunity for us to check for what needs to be put right in our lives, to see how we have failed and to assess the ways in which we can do better. Let us accept the challenge of Alexander Pope this Advent season: "*What does it profit me if Jesus is reborn in thousands of cribs all over the world and not reborn in my heart?*"

2) A message of warning and hope: The Church reminds us that we will be asked to give an account of our lives before Christ the Judge, both at the moment of our deaths and at Jesus' *second coming*. Today's readings invite us to assess our lives every night during Advent and to make the necessary alterations in the light of the approaching Christmas celebration. Amid the tragedies that sometimes occur in our daily lives and the setbacks in spiritual life, we must raise our heads in hope and anticipation, knowing that the Lord is coming again.

Advent I [C] (Dec 2): Jer 33:14-16; 1Thes 3:12 - 4:2; Lk 21:25-28, 34-36



Homily starter anecdotes: #1: Missing the signal!

In its day, the Titanic was the world's largest ship, weighing 46,328 tons, and it was considered unsinkable. Yet, late during the night of April 14-15, 1912, the unthinkable happened to the unsinkable. Near midnight, the great Titanic struck an iceberg, ripping a three-hundred-foot hole through five of its sixteen watertight compartments. It sank in two and a half hours killing 1,513 people. Before the Titanic sank, warning after warning had been sent to tell the crew that they were speeding into an ice field, but the messages were ignored. In fact, when a nearby ship sent an urgent warning, the Titanic was talking to Cape Race about the time the chauffeurs were to meet arriving passengers at the dock in New York, and what dinner menus were to be ready. Preoccupied with the trivia, the Titanic responded to the warning, "Shut up. I am talking to Cape Race. You are jamming my signals!" Why did so many die that night? Perhaps the crew disregarded the danger of the weather; there were not enough lifeboats on board; and the radio operator of nearby *California* was off duty; perhaps those responsible did not heed the warnings; they were preoccupied with other things! - Sometimes we believe that our 'ship' is unsinkable, our life is all well planned, and the unthinkable can never happen to us. We need to read the signs of the times, we need to pay attention to the warning signals. But if we are preoccupied with the trivial things of life we will miss the most important things till it is too late. The First Sunday of Advent gives us the warning to be watchful, waiting and prepared.

2: "Watch the road." There is a beautiful anecdote given by Msgr. Arthur Tonne clarifying the message of today's Gospel. Several years ago a bus driver in Oklahoma reached an unusual record. In 23 years he had driven a bus over 900,000 miles without a single accident. When asked how he had done it, he gave this simple answer: "Watch the road." In today's Gospel Jesus gives the same advice in several ways: "*Be vigilant at all times,*" "*Stand erect,*" "*Raise your heads,*" "*Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy.*" This is not only a good spiritual advice for the Advent season but also a safe rule for daily life. A good football player or basketball player should always concentrate his attention on the ball and the players. A good student must be alert, awake and attentive, watching the teacher and listening to his or her words. A good Catholic in the Church must be physically and mentally alert, watching the altar and actively participating in the prayers and songs. Like the Roman god Janus, who had two faces, one looking at the past year and the other looking into future, Christians during the Advent season are to look at the past event of the first coming of Jesus into the world and expectantly look forward to his second coming in glory.

3: Be patient, be faithful: Be faithful. Remember Albert Einstein's words after the Second World War: "As a lover of freedom, when the revolution came in Germany, I

looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but no, the universities were immediately silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers, whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom; but they, like the universities were silenced in a few short weeks. Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration for it, because the Church alone has had the courage to stand for intellectual truth, and moral freedom. I am forced to confess that what I once despised, now I praise unreservedly." We are Christ's Body in the world today. Be patient. Be faithful.

21 additional anecdotes are uploaded in my website <http://frtonyshomilies.com/>

Introduction: Advent is a time of waiting and hoping, of renewing our trust in God's merciful love and care, and of reflecting on the several comings (advents), of Christ into our lives. Besides his first coming at his birth, we are asked to reflect on Christ's coming as the risen Lord at Easter, in the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), in our everyday lives, at the moment of death, and at the end of human history (the second coming). The word Advent comes from the Latin '*advenio*', which literally means "come to." During this Advent season we should consider "coming to" Christ by "*abounding in love... for all,*" instead waiting for Christ to come to us. Just as we ended the previous liturgical season with an apocalyptic description of the end of the world we begin the new season of Advent with similar apocalyptic warnings. The Church invites us to join a pilgrimage of Faith by showing us a prophetic vision of Christ's first coming (advent), through the prophecy of Jeremiah with a prophetic vision of Christ in his glorious Second Coming through the Gospel selection from Luke, and by reminding us of his daily coming into our lives here and now through the second reading. She also reminds us that these are days of "*joyful and prayerful anticipation of Jesus' coming*" because the Advent season is intended to fill us with great expectations of the coming of the Messiah just as parents expectantly wait for the birth of their child and make preparations for receiving the child into their family. We know that all valuable things in life - a healthy child, a loving marriage relationship, a work of art, a scientific discovery - need a period of quiet incubation. In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah was waiting and hoping for an ideal descendant of King David who might bring security and justice to God's people. He was waiting for the Messiah of Israel, and we Christians believe that Jeremiah's waiting and hoping were fulfilled in Jesus. Jeremiah assures us that *the Lord our justice* will fulfill His promises and, hence, that we need not be afraid, in spite of the frightening events and moral degradation all around. "*For you I wait all day long,*" sings the Psalmist, expressing the central idea of patient and prayerful waiting for the Lord in today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 25), as he asks the Lord God to make known His ways to us, to guide us, and teach us. In the second reading, Paul gives instructions about how Christians should conduct themselves as they wait for "*the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His holy ones.*" He urges us to put God's promise of peace into action by cultivating a spirit of love for others. We are told to strengthen our

hearts in holiness (3:13) and abound in love for one another (3:12). In today's Gospel, Jesus prophesies the signs and portents that will accompany his *second coming* and encourages us to be expectant, optimistic, vigilant and well-prepared: "*When these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand*" (Luke 21:28). Jesus wants us to face the future with confidence in God's providence.

First reading: Jer 33:14-16, explained: Jeremiah, the prophet of hope, introduces us this year to our season of Advent. He was from a priestly family and was born in a little village called Anathoth, close to Jerusalem. Josiah, who was king (640-609 BC), in Judah in those days, was a God-fearing man. But he was killed in a battle at Megiddo by the invading Egyptians who were attacking the Assyrians (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2Chron 35:20-24). A later king of Judah, Zedekiah (598-587 BC), swore allegiance in the Name of the Lord God, to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in return for his life and continued to rule in Jerusalem, then rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2Chron 36:13). He faced an attack by the Babylonian (Chaldean) army which surrounded Jerusalem. The king ignored God's advice, given through Jeremiah, to surrender and save the town and its people, and he concealed the Lord God's message from his generals (Jeremiah 38: 17-27). As a result, the Babylonians took Zedekiah prisoner (blinding him after he had watched the execution of his sons), captured and looted the city, burned the Temple down, and sent the healthy Jews into exile leaving only some poor people (2 Kings 25:1-21; 36:17-21; Jeremiah 38: 28--39:10). Despite all this, Jeremiah conveyed words of hope from God to the people in exile: "I WILL BE WITH YOU." God says through the prophet that He will fulfill this promise by raising up a "just shoot," a righteous offspring of David, who will rule Israel in justice (see [2 Samuel 7:16](#); [Jeremiah 33:17](#); [Psalm 89:4-5](#); [27-38](#)). Jeremiah told the people that they would return to see their old city and their Temple again, and that their priests would return to their Temple duties (Jeremiah 33:17ff). Thus, through Jeremiah, the Lord God, speaking His inspiring words at such a tragic moment, kindled hope and optimism in the people. What does it mean *to raise up for David a just shoot*? David was this people's first great king, and he became the standard by which subsequent kings were measured. "Shoot" is an image from farming or gardening, meaning a young growth from a mature plant. These people believed their fortunes were linked to the justice of their king. So, for them, a "just shoot for David" would have meant a new king, descended from David, whose justice would have positive effects among the people, and who would then get a new name: "*The Lord our justice.*"

Second Reading, [1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2](#), explained: Readings in early Advent always carry forward from the last Sundays of the previous liturgical year the theme of Jesus' coming again. At the time Saint Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (rather early in his apostolic career), he and they believed Jesus was to return soon. Jesus' coming would mean the end of history and the judgment of all peoples. But some Thessalonian Christians began to doubt the promise of Christ's second Coming because it was indefinitely delayed. Hence Paul gave them some clarification, emphasizing proper behavior in this part of his letter. "*May the Lord make you increase and abound in*

love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His holy ones." Paul tells them that what they do while they're waiting is just as important as the event for which they're waiting. Hence, he prays for their transformation. He prays that they, and we, will abound in love and that our hearts will be strengthened.

Gospel exegesis: Two versions of the end time events: Today we move from the year of Mark (B) to the year of Luke (C). In fact, today's Gospel is Luke's version of the Gospel we read two weeks ago from Mark. Luke seems to be the first evangelist who believed that everyone in his community would die a natural death before Jesus triumphantly returned in the Parousia or Second Coming. Still, many years after Mark's Gospel, Luke wrote about the Parousia. Comparing Mark 13:24-32 which we read two Sundays ago with Luke 21:25ff, which we read today, we note that Luke has reduced the scope of the spectacular celestial events of the Last Days and has omitted Mark's description of the *Son of Man*. The reason for these changes may lie in the events filling the years between Mark's Gospel (AD 69), and Luke's work (AD 80). Mark wrote his Gospel sometime before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Jewish Christians believed that the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple would coincide with the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus. But when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, the world did not end. Perhaps taking this into account, Luke, completing his Gospel in A.D. 80, dissociated the destruction of the Temple from Jesus' prediction of the end of the world. In today's Gospel passage, Jesus warns us to keep watch for his return in glory. He draws on Old Testament images of chaos and instability - turmoil in the heavens (see [Isaiah 13:11,13](#); [Ezekiel 32:7-8](#); [Joel 2:10](#)); roaring seas (see [Isaiah 5:30](#); [17:12](#)); distress among the nations (see [Isaiah 8:22](#); [14:25](#)) and terrified people (see [Isaiah 13:6-11](#)).

The context: The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple created a major crisis of Faith for the early Christians. Since the expected end of the world did not come, many Christians gave up their belief in the Second Coming of Christ, abandoned their Faith and began living lives of moral laxity. It may have been in order to address these needs that Luke continued with the second half of today's Gospel, Jesus' exhortation to all of His disciples, then and now, to be on their guard against "*dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life*" (21:34).

Jesus' warning: Neither Paul nor the evangelists were preparing their readers for Christmas. Instead, they were helping these Christians to boost their spirits while they waited for Jesus to accomplish things in their lives that would give them a share in His risen life. Luke advised his readers on *how* they were to *wait* and *prepare* for the Lord in their *present* situation of indefinitely waiting for Christ's second coming. They had to shift their attention and energies from *future* fulfillment to *present* service and commitment. They must prepare themselves by watchfulness and prayerfulness. That's why, after reminding his community about the signs which would precede Jesus' Second Coming, Luke gives them Jesus' warning: "*Be on guard lest your spirits become bloated with indulgence and drunkenness and worldly cares. Pray constantly for the strength to*

escape whatever is in prospect and to stand secure before the Son of Man." Since our own transformation is an ongoing process, we move yearly through the liturgical celebration of the mystery of our salvation. While Advent is set aside to commemorate Jesus' coming in the flesh as well as his final coming in glory, it is also a time for us to open ourselves to the Lord's coming into our lives and our world today. In order to do this, we must read the signs of the times and adjust our lives accordingly. Jesus also gives us the assurance that no matter what terrors the future holds, he will be present, caring for his followers.

Life messages: 1) We need to prepare ourselves for Christ's second coming by allowing him to be reborn daily in our lives. Advent is the time for us to make this preparation by repenting for our sins, by renewing our lives through prayer and penance and by sharing our blessings with others. Advent also provides an opportunity for us to check for what needs to be put right in our lives, to see how we have failed, and to assess the ways in which we can do better. Let us remember the words of Alexander Pope: *'What does it profit me if Jesus is reborn in thousands of cribs all over the world and not reborn in my heart?'* Jesus must be reborn in our hearts and lives, during this season of Advent and every day of our lives, in our love, kindness, mercy and forgiveness. Then only will we be able to give people his hope by caring for those in need, give them God's peace by turning the other cheek when we are provoked, give them His love by encouraging those who are feeling sad or tired, and give them His joy by encouraging and helping those who feel at the end of their strength, showing them that we care and that God cares as well. When, with His grace, we do these kinds of things we will receive hope, peace, love, and joy in return. Then we will know that when the King, our Lord Jesus, returns on the clouds of glory, we will be ready for Him.

2) A message of warning and hope: The Church begins the Advent season of Liturgical Cycle C by presenting the second coming of Christ in glory, in order to give us a vision of our future glory in Heaven and to show us the preparation needed for it. She reminds us that we are accountable for our lives before Christ the Judge. Today's readings invite us to assess our lives during Advent and to make the necessary alterations in the light of the approaching Christmas celebration. Advent is the time for an improvement of our lives and for deepening the sincerity of our religious commitment. It is a call to "look up" to see that Christ is still here. We must raise our heads in hope and anticipation, knowing that the Lord is coming again. Luke reminds us to trust in Jesus, amid the tragedies that sometimes occur in our daily lives. Our marriage may break up; we may lose our job, discover that we have cancer or some terminal illness or become estranged from our children. In all such situations, when we feel overwhelmed by disaster and feel that our lives have no meaning, Jesus says: *"Stand up, raise your heads, because your salvation is near"* (Lk 21:28).

JOKE OF THE WEEK: #1: Who came up with this? A woman was in the mall doing her Christmas shopping. She was tired of walking through every aisle of every store to find just the right present. She was stressed out by the mounting debt on her

credit card. She was tired of fighting the crowds and standing in lines for the registers. Her hands were full and when the elevator door opened, it was full. "Great!" she muttered and the occupants of the elevator, feeling her pain, graciously tightened ranks to allow a small space for her and her load. As the doors closed she blurted out, "I think whoever came up with this Christmas junk ought to be found, strung up and shot!" A few others shook their heads or grunted in agreement. Then, from somewhere in the back of the elevator came a single voice that said, "Don't worry. They already crucified him."

#2: Sign on a Church bulletin board: "Merry Christmas to our Christian friends. Happy Hanukkah to our Jewish friends. And to our atheist friends, good luck."

#3: "We don't have time for that!" Typical of last-minute Christmas shoppers, a mother was running furiously from store to store. Suddenly she became aware that the pudgy little hand of her three-year-old son was no longer clutched in hers. In panic she retraced her steps and found him standing with his little nose pressed flat against a frosty window. He was gazing at a manger scene. Hearing his mother's near hysterical call, he turned and shouted with innocent glee: "Look Mommy! It's Jesus - Baby Jesus in the hay!" With obvious indifference to his joy and wonder, she impatiently jerked him away saying, "We don't have time for that!"

A BIT OF SERIOUS ADVENT THOUGHT: An Advent Examination (Edward Hays, *A Pilgrim's Almanac*, p. 196): "Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place. Daily we can make an Advent examination. Are there any feelings of discrimination toward [people because of] race, sex, or religion? Is there a lingering resentment, an unforgiven injury living in our hearts? Do we look down upon others of lesser social standing or educational achievement? Are we generous with the gifts that have been given to us, seeing ourselves as their stewards and not their owners? Are we reverent of others, of their ideas and needs, and of creation? These and other questions become Advent lights by which we may search the deep, dark corners of our hearts. May this Advent season be a time for bringing hope, transformation, and fulfillment into the Advent of our lives."

