

First Sunday of Advent – Extraordinary Form
Ave Maria Catholic Church, Sunday, Nov. 27, 2022

Romans 13: 11 –14

Brethren, you know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness [and] put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lk 21: 25 –33

At that time Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” He taught them a lesson. “Consider the fig tree and all the other trees. When their buds burst open, you see for yourselves and know that summer is now near; in the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Awakening Love

First Sunday of Advent

Ave Maria Catholic Church, November 27, 2022 – Fr. David M Vidal

Today, we begin a new liturgical year. Our Holy Mother, the Church leads us through this season of grace to our encounter with Jesus. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. For this reason, we begin this new liturgical year by preparing ourselves for the coming of our Lord.

There are visible and sensible signs that mark this new liturgical season. The violet or purple color reminds us that this is a time of penance. The omission of the prayer of the *Gloria* also emphasizes this. These external signs should reflect our internal dispositions.

What does “advent” mean? Advent means expectation. Advent teaches us that we must await the coming of our Lord. We anticipate with great desire the nativity of our Lord, the coming of the Messiah, our Savior, in the humility and poverty of Bethlehem. However, our expectation is not limited to the first coming of Jesus. We also await the second coming of our Lord, and we know by faith that in his second coming, Jesus will be seen with all his glory and power as the judge of all.

For this reason, Advent is a time of conversion. We should remember how the prophets prepared the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah. We should also recall how they proclaimed the need to rend their hearts, not just their garments. The prophets asked for conversion. However, the people of Israel did not understand. Then, the Lord told the prophet Isaiah: *“This people draws near with words only and honors me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from me,”* (Is. 19: 13).

We should listen and understand. What does one profit by wearing purple colors or even omitting joyful hymns if our hearts are far from God?

For this reason, the Church invites us to reflect on the need for conversion. Today, Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans: *“You know the time. It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed,”* (Rom 13:11).

Now is the time to wake up from sleep! What is the Apostle telling us? The holy Cardinal, Saint Robert Bellarmine, explains that when one is asleep and dreams, one believes that those dreams are true. That is a simple dream that comes and goes, that may frighten us and disturb us. But when we wake up, we say: “It was only a dream!” We should also realize that this world passes away like a dream and that we must be awake to a reality that is everlasting!

St. Robert Bellarmine found in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius recommendations for communicating the profound beauty of this everlasting reality. He wrote: *“If you have wisdom, may you understand that you have been created for the glory of God and for your eternal salvation. This is your goal, this is the center of your soul, and this is the treasure of your heart. Therefore, consider as truly good for you what leads you to your goal, and truly evil what causes you to miss it.”* (*De ascensione mentis in Deum, grad. 1*).

It is imperative for us to wake up and understand that we must not risk our eternal salvation and the ultimate goal of our existence. Then, after waking up, we must stay awake because the night is advanced, and the day is near!

How do we stay awake?

In our spiritual life, staying awake means being ready to accept what is good, true, and pure, and to reject what is contrary to the beautiful and providential plan for which God has created us. In our spiritual life, we stay awake with our hearts.

If we do not turn towards God with all our hearts, there will not be any transformation in our lives. Honoring God with our lips does not justify us. We must turn our hearts towards the Lord.

Saint Augustine discovered this as he said: *“Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; and the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord.”* (*The City of God*, bk. 14, ch. 28).

Do we belong to this world, or do we belong to the city of God? It depends on our love. Tell me what you love, and I will tell you where you belong. If you want to belong to the city of God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, then love heavenly things! Turn your hearts to the things that are above!

What does it mean to be converted? It means to turn towards God with your whole heart. Advent reminds us that we must be transformed; we must be converted. Now, to turn towards God, we must love the things that are above. Love is at the center of our ascension toward God.

Let us remember the words of the Apostle in his first letter to the Corinthians: *“If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing,”* (1 Cor 13: 1-3).

During Advent, we must examine where our hearts are. Then we must be sure that we do not pass through this holy season without *knowing* where our hearts are. Why must we do that?

Because many will say on the judgment day: *“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?”* Then the Lord will declare to them solemnly, *‘I never knew you,’* (Matt 7: 22-23).

How is it possible? Is that even possible? Prophesizing in God’s name, expelling demons, working miracles, and still being far from the Lord in such a way that the Lord will say: *“I never knew you”!*

How easy it is to waste the divine gifts, to become distant from God in thoughts and deeds! To be involved in the things of the Lord and, at the same time to be distant from the Lord.

This is why we must awake from sleep. We must awaken our hearts to God’s love, and then choose whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, and whatever is gracious, (Phil 4: 8). Then, we will anticipate with joyful hearts the day of the Lord.

May our Blessed Mother obtain for us the grace to begin this holy season of Advent with a great desire and determination to purify our hearts. May this holy season of preparation for the coming of the Lord transform our lives, not only in the external change of colors and hymns but, most importantly, in the holy transformation of our hearts. Amen