

## **First Sunday of Advent C - Advent Means Getting Ready with Hope, not Just Waiting Around**

November 28, 2021.

Advent is with us again. In our Liturgical Calendar, **Cycle C is The Year of Luke**. Luke has the distinction of being the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew but a Gentile, a medical doctor by profession (Colossians 4:14) and wrote the Gospel primarily for Gentiles. Paul, who most likely converted Luke, called him 'my dear and glorious physician'. Luke wrote his gospel for a man called Theophilus, most likely a high official in the Roman government, to help him come to know Jesus. **Luke's gospel is about God's love and mercy with several lovely stories on that theme.** For example, Jesus' encounter with the sinful woman (7:36- 50), the Parable of the Prodigal Son, more accurately called the Parable of the Merciful Father (15:11-24) and Jesus' mercy for the repentant criminal (23:39-43). **Luke's gospel has been called 'the gospel of the underdog** because of the great compassion Jesus shows for the marginalized. It is a **Gospel of women**. Only Luke's gospel features Elizabeth, Anna, the widow of Nain, and the Martha and Mary story. Women also bankrolled Jesus' ministry (Lk 7:50). **It is a Gospel of Prayer**. At all the great moments of Jesus's life, Luke shows Jesus at prayer. **Some of the best loved stories in all four gospels are only found in Luke**, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth in the Manger, the Parables of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan and the Emmaus story. **Some of the New Testament's most memorable characters are found only in Luke too:** the diminutive but resourceful Zacchaeus, the aged and astonished Elizabeth and Zechariah, the hospitable Martha and the attentive Mary. **Some of Jesus' most beloved parables—**brimming with poignancy and compassion, and universal in their broad religious and humanitarian appeal—**are jewels of Luke's gospel:** the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and poor Lazarus, the Pharisee and the tax collector. The backbone of the Church's daily prayer, **Divine Office comes from Luke's gospel:** Zechariah's Canticle at Morning Prayer, Mary's Magnificat at evening prayer, and Simeon's Canticle at night prayer. **Luke's portrait of Jesus is perhaps the most beloved and easily approachable of all the gospels. Luke's Jesus is the embodiment of divine compassion. Indeed, Luke's portrayal of Jesus is at the heart of his proclamation of the "good news."**

Advent, which starts this Sunday, is sometimes understood as a waiting period, waiting for Christmas to arrive, that's the prophecy in the First Reading (Jeremiah 33:14-15). **This waiting period between Advent and Christmas is supposed to make us think deeply about another waiting period. The one between now and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, who will bring history to its fulfillment, judgement of the living and the dead, and the definitive end to evil.** This second waiting period is what our Lord refers to in the Gospel passage (Luke 21:25-28, 34-36). But is Advent really just a waiting period? Is human history just waiting periods in which we wait for the Second Coming to happen? No. **They are more than waiting periods; they are getting-ready periods. Advent is a period of time in which the Church surrounds us with reminders of the greatest event in the whole history of the universe: the incarnation of the Son of God, who came to earth to be our Saviour. These four weeks are about getting ready with hope. One reason the Catholic Church has continued to survive and thrive for the past two thousand years is precisely because being a Christian is not passive; it's an active, life-changing, world-transforming process.**

Philomena and I both joined the same university Legion of Mary Presidium in the Fall of 1988. We had retreats, outings and dinners after the weekly meeting as a group but never alone. Our first date was on a Saturday afternoon around Advent in 1989. She wanted me to guide her to some Chinese bookstores in Kowloon (the peninsula side where I lived). She lived in Hong Kong (the island side). We were supposed to meet at the ferry terminal at 1pm. I

waited, 1:30pm, no show, 2:00pm, no show, 2:30pm, 3:00pm, 3:30pm, still no show. All the time, I was worrying, hoping and praying that everything was OK with her. Finally, she showed up at around 4pm. She had guitar lesson and visited her friend during these three hours. I just listened to her explanation. Later on she told me honestly she was not sure if we should meet alone. Thank God she changed her mind and the long wait was worth for all the happiness we now have. I did take her to the bookstore and found the book she wanted for her translation course term paper. **That's how our love relationship started: waiting with prayer and hope.**

There is absolutely no better way to get ready for Advent and for Christ's Second Coming than by helping someone else get ready for them too. And we do that by living lives that reflect and communicate God's goodness. St Francis of Assisi's most famous prayer gives us a to-do list in this regard. If each one of us prayed it every morning during Advent and did just one thing each day to try and make part of it come true in our lives, this would be one of our best Christmases ever, guaranteed. **"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy; O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."**

**It is indeed in giving that we receive.** For all the faithful, there are at least two things we should do in order to get ready. First, we need to get ready for this year's celebration of Christmas, the coming of our Saviour to earth. In every liturgical season, God has special graces for us. One reason the Church uses liturgical seasons is precisely to make us aware that God wants to give us these special graces. We don't know ahead of time what they will be. It could be a deeper insight into the meaning of our existence and a greater peace of mind. It could be an experience of forgiveness and mercy. It could be an infusion of spiritual strength to take a step we have long wanted to take, but have been afraid to. **God knows what he wants to give us this Christmas; we just have to get ready to receive it. And that means doing what the Church does, finding ways to think more frequently and deeply about God's love and God's plan of salvation.** If Christ at Bethlehem is not born into our hearts, if his presence has had no influence on us, then we have not yet wakened up to our need for a Saviour to free us from our sins. So the second thing we are getting ready for is the end of history, the final judgment. This means turning away from our sins, repenting, and making a fresh start on the path of following Christ's teaching and example. This is why the clergy wear purple or midnight-blue vestments during Advent, as a penitential sign. And of course, there is simply no better way to do this than by preparing and having a good confession. The sacrament of reconciliation is the perfect method to get ready for the Second Coming. Prayer, penance and works of mercy are necessary preparations for the coming of the Lord.

**Brothers and sisters, Jesus is the hope of the world because he is the only one who can truly reconcile us through our reconciliation with God and with one another. Through his death and resurrection Jesus breaks down the walls of hostility and division by reconciling us with God. He gives us his Holy Spirit both to purify us and restore us as a holy people of God. Lord, come to make your dwelling place within us and make us become living temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Amen.**