

## **Advent 1**

### **12.1.24**

On the evening of October 9<sup>th</sup>, I sat at home and steadied myself for Hurricane Milton which was descending upon our coast. I felt fairly secure where I was. The place I sheltered was made of concrete block. The roof had a low profile and was recently replaced. It was located in a non-evacuation zone and nestled between several other homes.

I was, however, concerned about the many oak trees which surrounded the house. As I looked at the streetlights, I watched the rain blow sideways. Wind gusts began creeping up – 80, 90, 100 miles per hour. I heard tree limbs and other objects bounce off the roof. Like you, I waited. I prayed. And I'm not ashamed to say, I was afraid.

I formulated a plan in my head as to what I would do should something come crashing into my home. I began to clear out a hall closet as my safe spot, but quickly realized that my 6' 2" frame would not fit in there. I decided the bathtub would be my safe spot. I recalled a roommate from college who spent Hurricane Andrew with his family in the bathtub holding onto a mattress while the hurricane raged overhead.

In the aftermath of Milton, I reflected on some things I might do differently when the next storm approaches. I could probably prepare sooner. I should come up with a plan for leaving the area altogether when a storm reaches a certain intensity. My supply list might be increased since power could have been out even longer than it was.

Thinking about better preparations for the future didn't result in making me feel more anxious. Rather, it helped give me a sense of grounding and comfort.

Today, we begin the Season of Advent. While the rest of the world is knee-deep in preparing for Christmas, we use the first several weeks of the Advent Season to prepare for something else. We prepare to meet Christ at the end of time. We assess how well we are living as members of the Kingdom of God. Part of our preparation should involve evaluating how we should do things differently in order to shore up the foundations of our faith.

The gospel passage we hear today at Mass comes from the latter part of St. Luke's gospel. In the lead-up to today's passage, Jesus is finishing up his earthly ministry and is about to enter his passion and crucifixion. He is telling his disciples to prepare for that moment. He encourages them not to give into fear. He reminds them that he will be with them. Obviously, the disciples don't do a good job of listening to him. They become fear filled. They abandon Jesus. But he stays the course. So does his mother, the women disciples, and the one of the men, the Apostle John.

After the resurrection, Jesus meets his disciples in the Upper Room. To say they are afraid is an understatement. He reminds them to be at peace. And since they don't quite get it, he tells them again, and again, and again – peace be with you. Then he breathes on them - that is, he gives them a part of himself which brings them peace and emboldens them to minister as he did.

We should also note that the gospel of Luke was written about 50 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Those hearing this gospel in the year 80 or so would know that the Temple had been destroyed just 10 years before. That prediction is something we heard in today's gospel passage. The audience listening to this gospel would also know that Israel has been overrun by foreign oppressors. Its citizens were filled with fear and had no hope.

But Christians were the exception. They knew that Jesus Christ who suffered and died, was raised from the dead. They knew that despite their current circumstances, the same Jesus Christ would sustain them. For that reason, they held their heads high and lived with hope – unlike everyone else around them.

There are many fear-inducing things which surround us. The threat of future hurricanes. The cost of living. Wars and insurrections which seem to proliferate around the globe. Our future as a nation. The future of civilization.

While we live IN this world, we are not OF this world. As folks who have experienced fear, we don't let fear rule over us. What rules over us is really a who – Jesus Christ.

Advent is the time of year given to us to deepen our relationship with the resurrected Christ. Advent is the time to seek out Christ present among us and to acknowledge that it is Christ alone who conquers fear and anxiety. Advent is the time to explore those things and ways to shore up our faith foundation, so that we can better live as Children of God and steadfastly walk the path to God's Kingdom.

Just as we prepare for storms during hurricane season, we are to prepare for our encounter with Christ. We do this in a particular way during the Advent Season. Just as we prepare a hurricane kit when anticipating an approaching storm, we should work on an "Advent preparation kit". In that kit we should evaluate the status of the following:

- Mass – are we faithful in attending and participating in Sunday Mass? Do we look at the readings before coming to church? Do we prepare a list of who and what we will pray for? Do we prepare our gift for the offertory? Do we call to mind those that we struggle with intending to pray for them as we participate in the Mass?
- Prayer – are we faithful to praying regularly throughout the day? In the morning? Evening? And at mealtime? Do we pray the rosary – individually and as a family on a regular basis? Other than Mass, do we take advantage of praying with groups of people like Circle of Joy on Tuesday mornings or on Friday mornings after Mass (Marian Movement of Priests)?
- Confession / Reconciliation – have we made a commitment to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance during this Advent Season? Do we anticipate doing so on a Saturday morning or when our parish celebrates its Penance Services on December 18<sup>th</sup>? Do we admit when we are wrong? Do we apologize to others we have offended and do we seek to make amends for our sins?
- Do we engage in regular outreach to others by participating in ministries – by teaching, accompanying, cooking for and serving the needy?

These are just a few of the items that should be in everyone's Advent preparation kit. These items will not only help us to survive. They are the keys to thriving as Children of God. Engaging in each of these things helps us to be better prepared for that day when we will meet Christ face to face at the end of our lives.

Jesus reminds us of that day and time when he says at the end of today's gospel passage:

***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.***

So, what one thing will you do for the next four weeks of Advent? What will you add to your Advent preparation kit? The day to start our preparations to meet the Son of Man is today.

Amen? Amen!