

## Advent Calls for a Conversion of Heart

By

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When life-changing events occur, a basic question confronts us: what is really important in my life? At such times, we make distinctions between essentials and superfluties.

On this first of the four Sundays in Advent, the Church's new year of grace is upon us. *Adventus* means "coming." Advent is the time when the Church eagerly awaits with hope the coming of our Emmanuel, God-with-us, in a threefold way—Christ's coming in history, in our hearts, and in the final time.

During Advent, we prepare, watch, and wait for "the clouds to rain down the Just One." The Christmas season has its proper liturgical place. It begins not on the day after Thanksgiving but on Christmas Eve and concludes on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Today, the scripture readings prod us to vigilance about essentials. Readiness for the savior's coming is Jeremiah's message to his people. With Psalm 25, the community responds with longing for the Messiah whose birth is near. With Jeremiah, St. Paul cautions: be alert because we do not know when the final day or the hour will come. The gospel paints the theme in darker and more dramatic colors. We learn anew each day the meaning of vigilance and the need for prayer to sustain it. Watchfulness need not sow fear however. Christian hope expects the impossible from God because Christ our God has been raised from the dead.

Still, to prepare for Christ's threefold coming, a practical strategy for conversion of heart is needed. We seek no less than transformation into Christ by changing our behavior, which, in turn, will change our attitude. Three practical suggestions are here offered for us.

First, set aside five minutes a day (or more, if possible), at a convenient time to pray and repeat the Advent prayer, "Come, Lord, Jesus." Do it together with Mary and Joseph. Each day will bring deeper peace because of the transforming power of prayer.

Second, practice one life-affirming action—**doing a kind deed for a difficult** person, or expressing gratitude for blessings received. Our spiritual gifts to build up the Body of Christ "in the tangle of our minds" are abundantly creative.

Finally, resist consumerism wholeheartedly **despite external pressures**. The fool who hoarded possessions (Lk 12:13-23) is warned that he will face God "this very night." Sadly, he has made three mistakes in his life: that bigger means success, things bring happiness, and that time equals eternity.

With the Magi, let us prepare to offer the Lord our own gifts of love—prayer, virtue, and restraint. In the end, "love alone is credible." Before retiring, evaluate your efforts, resolve to start anew, and relax with good reading. Then, fall asleep in the Lord.

On Christmas Day, the newborn Savior will bless **our efforts** with life-giving joy and deep satisfaction. The world cannot give this.