

Fr. Rudy's Reflections
First Sunday of Advent
December 3, 2023

Be Watchful and Alert!

Today I wish you a happy new year, as it is the first day in our new liturgical year, the First Sunday of Advent. The Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ—his suffering, death, and resurrection—each liturgical year by presenting the events of Jesus's life here on earth, as well as the lives of his mother, Mary, and our blessed saints who continued his work during their lives. The Catholic liturgical year consists of six seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, the Sacred Pascal Triduum, Easter, and Ordinary Time. This liturgical year (2023–2024), we will focus on Sunday Cycle B, part of a three-year cycle (A, B, and C). This year will focus on the Gospel of Mark and Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John.

On this First Sunday of Advent, we focus on HOPE as we light the first candle of our Advent wreath and begin to prepare ourselves for the blessed season of Christmas. In this regard, our gorgeous Advent hymn, sung throughout the ages, describes the essence of our longing so movingly: “O come, o come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel; that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears.” Yes, all of us, whether we know it or not, have something in our lives we need to be saved from; we are imperfect human beings. We should consider how we might prepare for this blessed season and for our Lord's coming by really looking into one's soul. Are we truly awake and watchful? Are we living purposeful lives in love, compassion, forgiveness, honesty, and integrity, or are we asleep and unresponsive? Do we awaken each day in joy and gratitude for all we have been given, or do we create an atmosphere of restlessness, frustration, and unsatiable expectation as soon as we open our eyes?

Advent is a perfect time to get in touch with our thoughts and actions and how we are currently steering our lives. Because we truly owe *everything* to our Lord, we must ask him to continue to soften our rough exteriors and plant a more graceful and benevolent attitude in our hearts, both in how we worship him and how we extend ourselves generously to other people. Advent is the time to consider adopting a more penitential approach, in prayer and acts of mercy, all with the HOPE that the grace of these great things will enhance our lives as we wait, ever alert, and ready for the day he will come again.

“In today's Gospel we heard the Lord's invitation to be watchful. . .The exhortation to be watchful resounds many times in the liturgy, especially in Advent, a season of preparation not only for Christmas, but also for Christ's definitive and glorious coming at the end of time. It therefore has a distinctly eschatological meaning and invites the believer to spend every day and every moment in the presence of the One 'who is and who was and who is come' (Revelation 1:4), to whom the future of the world and of man belongs. This is Christian hope!”—Saint Pope John Paul II

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Rudy