

Homily for the First Sunday in Advent

December 2-3, 2017

Readings: Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

Preacher: Jeanne Mooney

A group of fourth graders in our Wednesday Night Faith Formation were brainstorming ways to get ready to meet Jesus in Heaven. “Pray,” “Read the Bible,” and “Be kind to others,” topped the list. One busy young man was not convinced that he needed to do anything to prepare for Jesus coming; he didn’t want to add another task to his day. “It’s not like a meteor’s going to hit the Earth tomorrow,” he said, “Do we need to do this now?”

For the next few weeks, we add “getting ready for Christmas” to our usual litany of tasks: shopping for gifts, driving to concerts, baking Christmas cookies. We hold on to the to-do list, but our “thank you” to the store clerk gets lost in the rush to complete the next task on our agenda. Relaxing with family and friends sinks to the bottom of the list, and time for prayer slips away. Instead of feeling the joy of Jesus’ coming to our world, we are feeling stressed. What would we give for a moment of peace? Like the young man in Faith Formation class, we wonder how to make time for Jesus in the middle of all this activity.

Jesus gives us the answer in this week’s gospel: we are the “gatekeepers” of our precious time. If we are watchful, and keep our minds and hearts alert, we can find moments to stop and connect with others, and with Him. Moments to drink coffee with a friend, offer a smile of gratitude to a frazzled store clerk, or say “thank you” for the many gifts of our generous God. In the second reading, Paul writes confidently to the Corinthians of the grace and peace that is theirs as disciples of Jesus. The gift of God’s peace is ours as well.

Being “ready for Jesus” is not just preparing for Christmas Day; Jesus asks us to be watchful and alert for God’s presence in our lives every day. The minutes I pause to pray before the day begins set my feet on a path of peace throughout the day. Time spent in stillness and prayer will bring

peace during the stressful weeks ahead. Connecting with God in prayer draws me to moments of connection with others and helps me to notice the times when Jesus is already here.

During last week's holiday, I spent time with family in a joyful mix of unpacking, cooking, hugs, and everyone talking at once. Looking back, I remember most vividly minutes of quiet conversation. Chatting with my husband and my brother as they put up the Christmas lights for my parents. Sweeping leaves off the deck, listening to my nieces decorate the tree. Watching my sister listen to my college-aged daughter talk about a school project. These moments created pockets of peace in the tumult of our family celebration, and in these quiet times I am grateful for God's gifts of grace and peace.

During this season of Advent, let time together with friends and family become pockets of peace. Watch for opportunities to nurture and renew our relationships with God and with each other, and pray for the grace to be alert for God's presence in our lives.

To help you all with your Advent planning for the arrival of Jesus, I share this Family Prayer for Advent, which comes from Loyola Press.

God of Love,
Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.
He is a sign of your love.
Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,
As we wait and prepare for his coming.
We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior.
Amen.