

First Sunday of Advent – Year C

Fr. Chad S. Green
Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
28 November 2021

Jeremiah 33:14-16
Psalm 25
1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
(Psalm 85:8) Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Show Us, Lord, Your Love

Today, the First Sunday of Advent—the beginning of the new liturgical year—we begin in the same place where we left off at the end of last liturgical year. With Readings that point us to reflecting on the End of Time. Two Sundays ago, the Gospel Acclamation—the verse that is sung during the “Alleluia” before the Gospel—was from today’s Gospel of Luke: “Be vigilant at all times and pray...”¹

And in the Gospel from that Sunday, Jesus presented us with *The Lesson of the Fig Tree*.

Remember what that lesson was? Jesus said:

Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near.²

The Lesson of the Fig Tree teaches us that God’s power and grace are always at work—sometimes in hidden ways that we cannot easily see. Sometimes in ways that call us to rely upon faith and hope much more than knowledge.

With a fig tree, we can look at the barren branches in the fall and winter, and still know that there is life flowing in them. Even though they look dead, our experience gives us knowledge that new life will come forth from those branches in the spring. But, it takes vigilance and careful watching to notice when those stiff branches begin to soften. When those tiny green buds first poke through the brown surface. Then we know that soon those branches will be filled with the life of green leaves, fruits, birds, etc.

The same can be said about Jesus. His Holy Spirit is always at work in hidden ways that we can’t always see or understand or recognize. But we are called to be vigilant—we are

encouraged to have faith and hope—to help us get better at recognizing the signs of the Holy Spirit and new life that are preparing to burst forth from a difficult situation.

+++

“Be vigilant...” I don’t know about you, but when I hear the word “vigilant”, it makes me a little bit anxious. It sounds to me like we need to be on guard. We need to be watching, prepared, and ready—otherwise something bad might happen. And, there is an element of that. As Jesus said, when He returns to our world, there will be powerful signs that will frighten and perplex many people.³ And, even before He returns, there are things along the way that frighten and perplex us.

But, for disciples of Jesus Christ (*that’s us!*), Jesus encourages us *not* to be frightened or perplexed. Not to cower or turn away in fear. Rather, to raise up our heads and look.⁴

Look for what? Today’s Gospel Acclamation—the verse sung before the Gospel—comes from Psalm 85. The Gospel Acclamation always gives us a clue about the upcoming Gospel—a lens to see the Gospel through to help us understand it better. Today’s Acclamation gives us direction on what we are to look for when we raise up our heads:

Show us, Lord, your love...⁵

Being vigilant isn’t as much about being on guard against the attacks of evil—though Jesus clearly warns us to stay away from things that make our spirits weighed down and drowsy.⁶ Being vigilant is more so about looking for the Lord to show us His love. Another word for vigilance—looking for the Lord’s love—is *prayer*.

Jesus knows that the anxieties of daily life can weigh our hearts down. So, He offers us a help, a comfort, and a solace through the gift of prayer. We’ve been talking about prayer

frequently since this summer—the importance of having a retreat experience each day: a little bit of *time* each day; in a *place* away from the anxieties of everyday life; to reconnect with *God*.

That's what vigilance is. That's what being ready for Jesus to come again is. That's what getting ready for Jesus to come at Christmas is. Vigilance starts with being on guard against things that can weigh your heart down. But vigilance also involves another step of having faith and hope—of praying—of looking for the signs of God's love that are at work—even in ways that might be hidden to us.

+++

Another aspect of vigilance is described in our Second Reading by St. Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians. Vigilance isn't only looking for signs of God's love. It's also *being* the signs of God's love in the world. St. Paul encourages us with these words—which make a beautiful Advent prayer for us. A blessing from St. Paul over us—not only to prepare for Christ to come at Christmas, not only for Him to come at the end of time—but also for Him to come to us through one another each and every day:

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love
for one another and for all...
so as to strengthen your hearts,
to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.⁷

¹ Luke 21:36

² Mark 13:28

³ Luke 21:25-26

⁴ Luke 21:28

⁵ Psalm 85:8

⁶ Luke 21:34

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13