

Father O'Connor's Homily for 30 November 2025
First Sunday of Advent-A

Isaiah 2: 1-5
Romans 13: 11-14
Matthew 24: 37-44

Advent isn't exactly a comfortable season. And I don't just mean the frost on the windshield and the certainty of January bills. Advent has a mysteriousness about it that won't be tamed by the caroling that begins at Thanksgiving or by the outdoor lighting displays.

The measured sobriety of Advent clashes with the festive rush in the stores. And the urgency of the Scripture readings clashes with the secular messages of materialism and individualism. And, if the truth be told, the threat of a final cosmic judgment in today's Gospel grips us no more than the "eager longing" thematic of the Advent hymns.

Just how are we to identify with this season of Advent? Its purple sobriety contrasts with the red and green festival of an American Christmas that begins with October advertising. And for all of the expectation that we feel for the coming of "the holidays," the coming of Christ in glory can seem so remote and even unlikely.

What are we to do? We can, of course, feel guilty. But guilt is not the keynote of the Advent season either. Joy is so characteristic of Advent that nearly every Responsorial Psalm is a Psalm of rejoicing. Like today's: "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord" [Psalm 122]. The Advent Psalms don't say: "Feel guilty that you are not rejoicing." They just say: "Rejoice!" But it is not exactly the rejoicing of the office party either.

Advent seems to be such an untidy season. Here a comforting Scripture passage, and there a threat; unusual John the Baptist at the edge of the desert and humble Mary in Nazareth; the purple of repentance and the songs of rejoicing; the "last day" in the Gospel on the first Sunday of Advent is a day of final judgment and we pray to greet it with joy. What a mess! No instant relevance and not even a tidy thematic.

How, then, should we deal with Advent? As a cherished heirloom, annually dusted off for a churchly "For Auld Lang Syne"? As a bit of a "liturgical Williamsburg"?

But here is another possibility: that we attempt to penetrate what the Scriptures and the liturgy are saying to us during this season – without asking them to say what we would like them to say, and without asking them to say it in a way that we would like to hear it.

For both the Scriptures and the liturgy are about the relationship of God with His people. And relationships – in case anybody hasn't noticed – aren't always tidy.

And the Scriptures and the liturgy are not always communicating information about the relationship between God and His people. In many cases, they are more concerned with the meaning of the relationship between God and His people.

And while the Scripture passages we read in the liturgy are grounded in the past, they are “the living Word of God” and here for us to reflect upon their meaning for us today.

Advent's thematic is so simple that it is not likely to make the banners this year: “God is present to us.” For “Emmanuel” means “God is with us.”

Advent looks to that great feast of God's presence to us: Christmas. God is present to the world in His Son, Jesus Christ – who, as the Nicene Creed professes, “For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.”

Our medieval ancestors, in their statues and iconography, often portrayed Mary as pregnant.

In our church at Saint Joseph, there is a shrine in the back with a statue of Mary who is clearly expecting the Christ Child. It is also known as “The Pregnant Virgin,” and “Our Lady of the Advent.” And this image has so much to say to our age which is in serious danger of forgetting that the God-given gift of human life begins at our conception and not at our birth.

As the calendar of the Church Year testifies, the Eternal Son of God became man on March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel asked Mary to be the Mother of God's Son, and Mary said “yes,” and He “was conceived by the Holy Spirit.” Then, nine months later, on December 25th, the Feast of Christmas, He was “born of the Virgin Mary” [Apostles' Creed] in Bethlehem. Jesus lived in Mary's womb all nine months of her pregnancy.

As mothers know, pregnancy isn't a very comfortable thing. Its hope is tinged with morning sickness and swollen ankles. You know that your child is living within you. You can feel your child kicking. But right at the

moment, you can't see the face of the one who is soon to be born. But you will.

And that is what Advent – the coming of Christ – is about. The splendor of God's presence is hidden within the everyday untidiness of our lives – and beneath the pain and poverty of this world.

But we live in hope: God is present to us even now -- in His Son and Mary's Son, Jesus. We long to see His face, and one day we will. But even now we can feel His presence within us and among us.

This Advent season – like the pregnant Virgin Mary – is short on explanation and heavy with meaning.

And today as we begin our Advent journey to Christmas, the Feast of Our Lord's birth, "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord."