

2nd Sunday of Advent “The Light of Christ Shines on What Matters Most”

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In South Dakota, there is a vast stretch of plains that scientists tell us used to be an inland ocean. If there were human beings 70 million years ago, someone could have sat on the shore of this ocean feeling like this ocean was quite permanent. Now, scientists can only point to the evidence that there used to be an ocean there. On the western side of South Dakota are the Bad Lands. They say the Bad Lands used to be a mountain range that eroded into what we see there today. We can look at Mount Rainier or Mount Baker as if they are quite permanent. They are not. Mt. St. Helens can attest to that. As the scriptures say, the mountains will be made low...and scientists can point to where that has happened. And, if you are not impressed by that, scientists also tell us that say in a billion years or so, the sun itself will have expanded to the point where the earth's atmosphere will have burned away. The point is: there will come a day in the future when everything that humanity has built on this planet will be destroyed forever.

What a “Debbie Downer”! These are not happy thoughts and if we think about these things too much we can be led to a dark and hopeless place. During the season of Advent, however, the Church asks that we take some time before Christmas to stay put and reflect on the darkness in the world around us just for a little longer so to understand why we keep vigil for Christ our light and why the birth of Jesus matters. We cannot save ourselves. Jesus is our only hope in this world and the next.

You see, sacred scripture sometimes asks us to reflect on the finitude and futility of the world in which we live so to invite us to look higher, to look beyond what is created and look to the Creator who alone is eternal. Rather than seeing our lives as an exercise in existential futility, we live our lives as a people of Advent, a people who keep vigil, who look forward to the Lord's return in glory. Only the love of God can give us perspective on the decisions we make and draw us beyond the fading of this world to what Revelation calls a new heaven and a new earth. As the world gets darker and darker, the Gospel offers us a light to shine our way. This good news has an impact on how we view our world today so to be better stewards of everything that has been entrusted to us.

In the moments when we are fearful about the future, St. Paul gives us good advice in our second reading. He says, “This is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” During Advent, as we make out our Christmas lists and manically run around trying to get everything we need to do accomplished, there is something very wise about stepping back and asking ourselves, what really has value in this life?

John the Baptist has a perspective here. We are journeying with the Gospel of St. Luke. Bishop Barron has a humorous insight here. It is the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. These people were “who’s who” in Jesus’ day. If you were powerful or wanted to be powerful you would want to be near or be friends with these people. So ask yourself who does God send his revelation to? None of them! Not to Caesar, not to Herod, not to someone living in a castle or mansion, not to someone wealthy or famous, God sends his revelation to some guy named John who wore camel hair and ate locusts. Great leaders come and go. Kingdoms through the centuries have risen and fallen. Therefore, John is the one to whom the word of God comes. Why? John didn’t value mansions or possessions. John valued his relationship with God above everything else...and so should we.

Brass tacks, at the end of our lives, it will not matter if we lived in mansions or lived in tents, it will not matter what accomplishments we achieved or how expensive our car was. It will not matter how many gifts we had under the Christmas tree. At the end of time this all will turn to dust. At the end of our lives, what will matter is: did we live our lives in right relationship with God and the people around us, especially the most vulnerable? Were we faithful disciples of Jesus who alone can help us transcend the futility of this world to the permanence of the next? Since we only have so much time in this life, are we filling our lives with what matters most or are we settling for lesser treasure?

And so, we have lit the second candle. We are invited again this Sunday to keep vigil for the Messiah. We wait in hope for the salvation that can only come through Christ our Lord. We live as people of the Kingdom of God by preparing in this life for what matters most in the next. We go so far as to pray the ancient prayer, maranatha! What does maranatha mean? It means, come Lord Jesus! Come Lord Jesus! In every century, it is a prayer that says: with everything going on in our world today please Lord come soon and renew the face of the earth!