

**Homily**  
**First Sunday of Advent**  
**Cycle A – 2007**

Happy New Year!

Now you don't have to run out and buy a calendar just yet – you've got a whole month for that, but today we begin a new Church Year – a new Year of Grace as we observe the first Sunday of Advent.

Advent is a very powerful spiritual season and we observe it well here at the Church of Saint Ann. Our atmosphere committee has done a magnificent job in creating our Advent atmosphere – a stark contrast to the glitter and glow that has been in our Malls since Halloween pumpkins and skeletons were stored for next year.

A menu of programs and activities to help us focus on what is important during the season of distractions can be found in today's bulletin. And as part of our presentation of gifts today, you will be invited to come forward with your prayer commitments for this year.

At our 11:00 o'clock Mass today, a group of people who have been inquiring about becoming part of our Faith Community will make a formal commitment through the Rite of Acceptance. And our Sunday Scripture readings for this season are perhaps the richest of any time of the year. Our Music Ministries brings up for us that age-old hymn – O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!

**WELCOME TO ADVENT 2007!**

As I reflected on the Sunday scripture readings so many powerful thoughts came to mind – these readings are so rich. Fortunately for you, I've only selected three.

Accept a Savior  
Eliminate Options  
Stay Awake or Be Prepared

A word or two on each.

**Welcome a Savior**

In the Church Year, Advent is a penitential season. Certainly not as penitential as Lent with its prescribed fasting and alms giving, but penitential in a more subtle way. To accept a Savior into our life, we must first admit that we need one. – that we have sinned; that we are in need of repentance.

Friends, we live in a world that denies sin and consequently, deny the need of a Savior. If we have no sin, we have no need of repentance. If we have not sinned, we have no need for a Savior. The coming of Jesus doesn't make sense to those who don't need Him.

To welcome a Savior, we must be in touch with the fact that we need to be saved. If we lost our sense of sin, then it makes sense that we do away with a savior. This profound image of a baby in a manger – of God becoming human, vulnerable, accessible, one like us, to suffer and die for our sins makes no sense.

Snowmen/women, reindeer, elves, dogs or cats are much cuter and less demanding than a child being born in a stable with straw and oxen, to a tired and lonely couple recently married, quite confused, strangers in a foreign land. The very act of giving birth is a lifetime commitment to self –sacrifice, to putting someone else first, to living not for self, to living for the future, living with limits and restrictions on time and money and life style. Ask any parent for verification of this fact and I guarantee it will come back strong and clear.

One of the things we've learned from the Twelve Step Programs that have been so helpful in ridding people off addictions is the need to admit we have a problem, we need help, and we have sinned.

The addict is first in denial – I don't have a problem; I don't drink much; I've never missed work; or I only use the Internet for fun. It's a great tool, I can stop whenever I want; I can solve the problem.

It is often only when we hit rock bottom – lose our job, spouse, money, have a heart attack, that we come to admit: I've got a problem; I can't solve it on my own; I need help, I need to be saved; I need a Higher Power.

Sin is a problem that has me. I am not able, by my own efforts, to rid myself of it whether its pride or envy or greed. Whatever it is, whatever has got me, whatever is controlling my life – I need help! And help comes in the form of Jesus.

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.* What holds us captive?

*That mourns in lowly exile here.* – Our captivity makes us mourners – makes us sad and blocks our joy.

*Until the Son of God appears.* – Here is our Savior, our Higher Power that can free us from our captivity, free us from our sin.

Let this wonderful song be your mantra. Sing it and ponder it over and over again.

### **Eliminate Options**

Somehow in our society today, we have confused freedom with license. We have more options than we've ever had before, but do these options make us free or do they subtly rob us of our freedom – the freedom to be who we are called to be, to live vibrantly and directly.

Our second reading today is brutally honest – how should we live, with limits.

Not in orgies and drunkenness;

Not in promiscuity and lust;

Not in rivalry and jealousy.

As Christians, we need to be people who stand and say NO – that is not an option.

Abortion is not an option, and once we make that decision, all of the effort and energy and anxiety that would have gone into that decision, is directed at supporting the gift of life that we have received, as limited and as vulnerable as fact might be.

Divorce is not an option. And once that decision is made, then all our efforts and energy can be focused on repairing and developing a relationship.

War is not an option. And if we live within that limitation, all the effort and energy that goes into deeds of war can be directed to works of peace.

This week it was interesting to hear the Prime Minister of Israel on a TV show. He was asked why he thought this Peace Summit would be any different. His answer was insightful. He said, "Because at this time, war is no longer an option. If war is removed from the table as an option, then we have to find a way of peace."

No wonder Isaiah told us *to beat our swords into plowshares*. Imagine what the world would be like if we had taken that advice. Now is the time! It is the hour now for you to awake from your sleep.

### **Stay Awake – Be Prepared**

Three suggestions for Staying Awake during Advent:

1. Examine your conscience on a regular basis. Be more deeply aware of your need for grace, for your need to be saved. Look at your own sin. Look at the area of your life where you are out of control, where you are held captive. (Today's and next weeks bulletin contains an excellent guide for this.)
2. Ask for Forgiveness. Once you've made a moral inventory begin to reach out to those you've hurt and seek forgiveness.
3. Pray. Active participation in the Liturgy, reading Scripture, pray the rosary, visits to the Blessed Sacrament – so many ways listed in the Stewardship Prayer Form in the Bulletin and in the pews. Do whatever works for you. Prayer is waiting, watching, looking. Choose scripture reading, study, Mass, rosary, whatever focuses your attention on the need for God's grace.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

And ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lowly exile here.

Welcome to Advent 2007

Welcome a Savior!

Eliminate Options!

Stay Awake!