

Fr. John's Homily for the First Sunday of Advent 12-3-2023

JMJ CHS

It's the first Sunday of advent of the new liturgical year as we watch and wait for the coming of the Lord into the world at Christmas. It's a time of preparation, and each of us should consider doing something special. It's just like Lent when we prepare for Easter – extra prayer, almsgiving, going to confession... not to mention all that celebrating with Christmas concerts and Advent by Candlelight. The Giving Tree out in the Narthex has been transformed. All those tags are now gone and have been replaced with beautiful ornaments. So, the decoration process has indeed begun.

You know, I was recently thinking about the appearance of our church and how it has evolved over the years. Your various pastors have each made their own contribution:

Fr. Charlie Irvin was our founding pastor. Back in those days this was a bare field with a trailer over in the corner of the parking lot which was the parish offices. Sunday Masses were held over on Spicer Road at the VFW hall, and at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Hamburg. Eventually, the room we call the Activity Center was built and it was the site of our Sunday Masses.

Fr. Paul Cummings was the next pastor, and he was the one who built this church and gave the seed money for the Book & Gift Shop which has served our community for many years now.

Next came Fr. Tim Kryzaniak. He had an eye for beauty and began to decorate our worship space with paintings and statues and other changes. I do believe this altar platform along with the altar rails were added during his time here.

Fr. Bill Thomas was the founder of our School, and I know that he did something very important here in the Sanctuary – he moved the Tabernacle from over there, to over here. A good move. Jesus, front and center.

So all of these men brought their particular skills, talents and visions to our parish campus to make it the place it is today.

And then there was me. I, too, have added to the mix during my 16 years here. One of the things I've done that I'm quite pleased with is the addition of words to our walls – the *Word of God*, passages from scripture. The first one was the one out there in our hallway, which greets all of you as you come in. It's above your head and says, "*How awesome is this place. This is nothing less than the House of God and the Gate of Heaven.*" Those are ancient words from the third of the three great patriarchs – Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham. But they are applicable to any Catholic Church you walk into today that has a Tabernacle and a Sanctuary lamp. God is present here – body, blood, soul and divinity, and hopefully it should impress upon anyone who passes under those words that you are now standing on holy ground, and entering a sacred place and time. And you like to think that would inspire them, and influence their attitude. They would hopefully become more reverent.

And then we have these words over here on the wall of our Baptistry. The one on the right speaks of the origins of the sacrament of baptism where Jesus is baptized by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River. And then, over on the other side, the *Great Commission* – "*Go, therefore, baptize all nations, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.*" Those two passages inspire my preaching when I perform baptisms.

Back there in the cry room we have a short verse from one of the Psalms. Right below the big window it says "*Lord, I gaze on you in the sanctuary, to see your strength and your glory.*" And the altar here, and the tabernacle, are at the focus of their gaze.

Well, we have two more spots that I would like to fill. One would be above the entrance to the Activity Center. But I would really like something that would be an exit message, there above your heads, as you leave the building. I've been puzzling over this question for a long time now. But today, in our Gospel, we have a passage that I think might work. And not just for this season of Advent but, but for this time in history. It could be just one word. That last word of today's Gospel. **"WATCH!"**

That sounds pretty ominous doesn't it? It's a warning. And Jesus said this in several different ways. A short time ago we had the parable of the virgins who didn't have enough oil in their lamps. What was the message? Be careful. Keep your wicks trimmed. Have extra oil. There are other words. *"Be vigilant, be sober, and alert. For you know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come."* Or when the thief will come. These are not words about the first coming, but the second coming. And even though we will probably not be around for the big one, at the end of time, nevertheless, we need to be reminded on a regular basis to be careful, and vigilant, to be sober and alert. To Watch.

And so, every year at this time, the Church has deemed it appropriate to issue these reminders by giving us passages from both Old and New Testaments, that point forward to that time in the future, where Jesus will indeed come again, to separate the sheep from the goats, and to judge the living and the dead. We've had a few Christmas seasons in a row now where the condition of our world has caused us to pause for reflection. First, there was the great plague of Covid. Then we've had political upheaval, and a lot of people are concerned about the future of our Church, our country and our world. There have been wars and rumors of wars, and recently there in the land called "Holy", well, very ominous. We can't help but wonder, is scripture prophecy coming to pass in our time? Another one of the signs of the times is called the great apostasy, that is, the loss of the faith. Remember the big rhetorical question posed by Jesus a few weeks ago? *"And when the Son of Man comes, will you find any faith left on earth?"*

We are in the midst of this year of the real Eucharist, and we are called upon to reflect upon this central mystery of our faith. In this new year of 2024, the American church is planning a *Eucharistic Congress* in Indianapolis. I sure hope it's a great success, and they call great attention to the source and summit of our faith, that is Christ's real presence in our midst in consecrated bread.

As of today, this first weekend of Advent, we are now in Cycle B and next summer, we will again spend the whole month of August reading from John chapter 6. This is where Jesus spoke those difficult words about *eating his flesh and drinking his blood*. And at Christmas we will be gifting out another gift book to all of you. It's called *Beautiful Eucharist* and it contains essays from many well-known religious authors who speak about this great but hard to understand, and hard to accept truth.

I'll leave you with a statement made by Matthew Kelly here at the beginning of the book where he says, *"Encountering Jesus in the Eucharist should be like touching Heaven, and that should change the way we live here on earth."*

And *getting to heaven together* should certainly be the mission statement of all of us here at Holy Spirit Catholic Church and School.

~Fr. John