

Homily for Advent III – 2021

Today, the third Sunday in Advent, is usually called ‘Gaudete Sunday’ The word is Latin and translated it means “rejoice”. Traditionally the words of today’s epistle were the words of the Introit verse at the beginning of Mass on this Sunday.... *“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. Let your forbearance be known to all, for the Lord is near at hand...”*

The short season of Advent originated way back in the fifth century AD as a forty day fast in preparation for the annual celebration of Our Lord’s birth at Christmas. In the ninth century the duration of the season was reduced to the four weeks commencing four Sundays before Christmas. Most of the penitential characteristics of the season (that is, prayer, fasting, abstaining, performing works of mercy and making a sacramental confession) endured well into the early 20th century at least. It was then that the commercialisation of Christmas began to push the season of Advent to one side... even in faithful households.

In our time, Advent has, in most respects, suffered a total eclipse... even in the minds of the great majority of faithful Christians throughout the entire world. That being the case, every year the need for the season and its purposes simply has to be re-stated to the faithful and, if I may say, especially to the faithful of a church like ours that professes to be Catholic, Apostolic and Traditional in our life, worship and culture.

First let’s look at the externals of Advent in the liturgy itself. We are beginning each Solemn Mass during Advent with a visit to the Advent wreath which entails responses, prayer and lighting a candle. This custom is not so old, in actual fact, and it is Lutheran in origin but it continues to grow in popularity. The wreath was originally found in people’s homes and prayers of hope and longing were said daily during Advent. The large wreaths, like ours, found in many parish churches are at most 150 years old as a custom.

As times of communal prayer have largely vanished from most Christian homes, for a whole variety of reasons, the short prayers said or sung at the wreath in the church at Sunday Mass have assumed a greater importance. We are preparing for the coming of the Lord as an infant in his birth, as judge in the final consummation of all creation, whenever that may be, and we should always, as men and women of faith, be preparing for his coming into our lives every single day!

The church itself is somewhat more somberly decorated for the season. The vestment colour is purple except for today the third Sunday when Rose coloured vestments are worn

as they emphasise the joy and gladness that is soon to be ours in the dawn of our redemption with the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas. Similarly, in the longer season of Lent the fourth Sunday is known as Laetare Sunday, *'laetare'* also being a Latin word for 'Rejoice'. On the fourth Sunday of Lent the church also looks forward in a penitential season with eager anticipation to the greatest Feast of them all ... our Lord's glorious Resurrection. Again, in the spirit of joy and anticipation, the beautiful Rose coloured vestments are worn to remind us that something of supreme importance; something exciting; something so very beautiful in drawing high... the Lord's Resurrection.

A word about the Rose coloured High Mass vestments being worn today at Mass. They were donated in 2012 by the widow of the late Fr John Potter, who was Vicar of ASESK from 1986 - 1995. Fr Potter was the priest who really began the revival of All Saints Church as a fully and traditionally Anglo-catholic church. He certainly knew where he stood and he staunchly upheld orthodoxy and tradition when all about him was crumbling, so to speak. We owe him a good deal and remember his faithful ministry with gratitude each time these beautiful vestments are worn.

All of what I have said is possibly 'old hat' to many of you and for that I apologise, if that is the case, but it bears repetition simply because Advent has been so 'over run,' if you like, by the Christmas preparations, Christmas break ups, Christmas parties and Christmas shopping that occupy so much of our time in December.

How then can we keep the spirit of the season of Advent to the glory of God while we make our Christmas preparations? As ever, its best to look to the tradition of the church and at least attempt to interpret it according to our circumstances and our situations. The five features of a faithful preparation for the birth of Christ still call to us, no matter how busy and preoccupied we may be with the pre-Christmas rush. Here's a few very brief suggestions as to how any of us COULD observe them all.

1. Prayer. Say a simple seasonal prayer daily between now and Christmas. The Collect in our Prayer books for the last (25th) Sunday after Trinity is a beauty and so very apt... *"Stir up we beseech Thee O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people that they plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of Thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

You could also read (slowly and carefully) the first three chapters of St Luke's gospel in the days remaining before Christmas Eve.

2. Fasting. How does one fast? Its very simple really...you simply omit one meal and consciously offer the discipline of doing so to God. Yes.. its as straightforward as that. Nobody can say they couldn't do that once or twice between now and Christmas.

3. Abstinence. How does one do that? It's even easier than fasting. One abstains from some food or pleasure and again consciously offers the discipline of doing so to God. One excellent act of abstinence in Advent is to seriously abstain from giving useless, tawdry, trashy gifts, to children especially, this and every Christmas from now on, if you have not already made that decision.

4. Performing works of mercy. One straightforward way to perform works of mercy is to make a gift to a Christian charity of the money saved by our fasting and abstinence. Another good way to perform works of mercy is to make a gift to a Christian charity that is at least the equal of the MOST expensive gift I shower on my family and loved ones or possibly the equal of the cost of a Christmas Dinner. All of us could, and probably should, decide to be less wrapped up in giving to those whom we love and more generously concerned for those who are in great, even urgent, need of a merciful gift this Christmas.

5. Making a Sacramental Confession. Of course nobody MUST do this BUT the whole point of Sacramental Confession is to grow in two really critical aspects of the Christian life... The first is growth in repentance for our sins. Confession is always a timely reminder that the gospel of Jesus Christ is about mercy for repentant sinners. The gospel of Jesus Christ is NOT good news for people who think that they are at least as good as everyone else and probably better than most! Secondly, and just as, or even more importantly, when we make a Sacramental Confession we come face to face with the great love that Jesus Christ has for us in a most beautiful way... in a powerful way... in a profoundly and deeply moving way. Lives are changed when we make a good sacramental confession. Any one of us could make an appointment with Fr Rene or, if you prefer, you could ask him to direct you to quite a number of faithful priests in Melbourne who will hear your confession in complete anonymity, give you wise spiritual advice and pronounce the merciful forgiveness of Almighty God upon your life.

Only thirteen days of Advent remain, including today. Dear People I urge you as I urge myself... do five small but beautiful things for God over the next 13 days... Pray, Fast, Abstain, Give to the needy and make a good Sacramental Confession... I promise you, you will have the best Christmas you've had in years and possibly ever, if you do.