

First Sunday of Advent - Lectionary: 1

Reading 1 - [Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come, the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#) R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Reading 2 - [Romans 13:11-14](#)

Brothers and sisters: You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

Gospel - [Matthew 24:37-44](#)

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Introduction: The Two Races of the Season

We have entered a brand-new liturgical season, Advent. For many in our culture, this means it is time for great shopping deals, festive lights, and the familiar songs of the season. It is the beginning of the great "race to Christmas," a frantic period that can feel like running a gauntlet between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. Yet, this is not what God intended for us. Amid this controlled chaos, the Church offers us a powerful counter-invitation. Advent is a deliberate act of rebellion against the noise; it is a conscious reclaiming of our time and attention for God. It is meant to be a time of slowing down, of increased prayer, and of deep reflection on the people and things in our lives that are truly important, and the ways in which we need to be better lovers of them all. All of this, as a form of mental and spiritual realignment for readiness. Being prepared to freely and joyfully celebrate the coming of our Lord.

However, if we are being honest, many of us hear this call each year and begin to tune it out. The repetition of the Church calendar can become unimpressive. We think, "Here we go again, Advent... second verse same as the first," and our minds drift to our to-do lists while the homily sounds like a distant, muffled voice. For many, the message feels stale, and it's easy to "zone out." But, it's crucial to address these feelings, that the liturgical seasons are unimpressive in their repetition. You may be tired of hearing what seems to be the same message every Advent. But we must remember that just as an athlete goes to the gym and works a plan of repetition to build health and strength, we need spiritual repetition with the fundamentals of our faith to grow spiritually healthy. Besides, chances are pretty good that you're not a Saint, and you still need all the repetition you can get.

Herein lies the tension: we know we need this repetition, yet we feel numb to it. So how do we break this cycle and find a new fire in an old rhythm? The answer is simpler, and more profound, than we might imagine. **The crucial difference between this Advent and every other one you have ever lived is you.** You are not the same person you were twelve months or 12 years ago. Think about it. Over the past year, things have happened that have never happened before. You have gone to new places or experienced familiar ones in new ways. You may have recovered old friendships. Perhaps Christ came this past year for someone you love, and you have experienced grief in a new way. Maybe God answered particular prayers, or maybe you have grown colder and more indifferent in your faith. Whether for better or for worse, you are different.

Because you are different, this Advent ought to be new and different for you. It presents an opportunity to be open to God in ways you might not have been ready for until now. God is ready to meet you exactly where you are, to help you love Him and your neighbor in new and deeper ways, and to let you experience the freedom for which you were made like never before. Recognizing this "newness" in ourselves empowers us to take the practical steps that will make this Advent truly transformative.

And so, the purpose of our reflection today is to explore this call to preparation that presents us with a critical question: How can we break through the noise and the repetition to make *this* Advent a genuine opportunity for spiritual renewal and preparation? How can we ensure this year is different? The answer begins with truly hearing and understanding the urgent call found in today's scriptures, a call to awaken our hearts and prepare for an encounter with the Lord. We are called to prepare not just for the anniversary of our Lord's first coming into this world, but for that final, certain day when we will all meet Him again, and let's not forget all the ways Christ is coming to us every day... or at least he's trying to come.

The Unavoidable Appointment We Try to Avoid

Our modern lives are governed by schedules, calendars, and appointments. We plan for meetings, for deadlines, for vacations, for our children's futures. Yet, the single most certain appointment of our lives—

our final meeting with God—is the one we most often ignore. Confronting this reality, not with fear but with faith, is the foundation for a meaningful spiritual life.

Before the scriptures issue their warnings, they first extend an invitation. The prophet Isaiah calls out to us, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.” This is not a message of fear, but a call to pilgrimage, an invitation to a joyful journey towards God. It frames our entire faith as a purposeful walk with Him. But every journey requires preparation. To make this pilgrimage successfully, we must heed the counsel of St. Paul to “*throw off the works of darkness*” and stay awake to the warnings of the Gospel. These reminders strategically reorient us toward the ultimate goal of our lives: our final encounter with Jesus, whether at the end of our individual lives or at the end of time. The Gospel uses powerful analogies to ensure we stay awake on the path.

Yet there is a deep human tendency to avoid contemplating the end of this pilgrimage. As the scriptures for today remind us, we don’t like to think too much about how or when we will leave this world, and for some, the very subject is a source of great fear. But the purpose of the warnings we hear in the Second Reading and the Gospel is not to cause anxiety. It is to lovingly remind us of the final and ultimate purpose of our lives—our future with God. This raises a crucial question: How can the very goodness of ordinary life become a distraction from our ultimate purpose?

The Deception of the Ordinary

The most subtle spiritual danger often comes not from overt evil, but from being completely absorbed by the ordinary, everyday tasks of life. Recognizing that this is a powerful distraction, is vital if we wish to cultivate a state of true spiritual awareness.

The first analogy is from the Days of Noah. The Gospel speaks of people who, before the flood, were “*eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.*” Their failure wasn’t in doing these ordinary things; we do them, too. Their failure was in being so completely consumed by their daily routines that they were unprepared for the most important appointment of their lives. In our own time, this looks like being so absorbed by endless scrolling, so driven by careerism, so obsessed with planning every detail of our lives, that we forget the one appointment that truly matters. They were busy, perhaps successful, but they were not ready. This story forces us to turn inward and ask the piercing question: *How ready am I right now?*

The spiritual lesson here is sharp and direct: We can work hard for today, for tomorrow, for our children's future. But we must ask ourselves the piercing question: what about our real future—our future with God? What preparations are we making for that future? We can be wildly successful, make a lot of money, and have wonderful experiences, but they were not ready for the most important appointment of their lives. If we forget that most basic reality, all our other success is failure.

The Gospel continues with the image of two men working in a field and two women grinding meal. From the outside, they look the same, doing the same work. Yet, the critical difference is internal: We can look the same as everyone else on the outside while being worlds apart on the inside, where one heart is prepared and another is not. This illustrates a critical distinction: it is not our external activity but our internal disposition that matters. Daily work is necessary, but if we allow it to distract us from the most basic reality of our lives—our final call to God—then all our other success is failure. Our daily work, our family life, our responsibilities—all of it must be integrated with our preparation for God's final call. We are called not to guess the time, but to understand the very nature of what it means to always be ready.

If we are called to be in this state of constant readiness for our journey's end, the obvious question follows: how exactly are we to prepare amid our ordinary, busy lives?

The Blessing of Not Knowing: The True Meaning of Readiness

The call to readiness is not a fearful waiting game. It's a positive and life-giving invitation to be "*spiritually awake*." Understanding this perspective is the key to transforming our faith from one of anxiety to one of joyful anticipation. The point of the Gospel is that we should live every moment of every day like it could be our last. Spiritual readiness is not an abstract idea but a concrete set of choices and actions we can begin or begin to deepen, today. If this Advent is to be new, we must be intentional about both our inner disposition and our outward actions.

True readiness is not about knowing the future. It is about living fully in the present moment, learning to recognize Jesus's presence in our ordinary daily activities. It is a state of constant spiritual awareness, because as the scripture tells us, "*the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*." If we recognize His presence in our daily life now, we will surely recognize Him when He comes again. The question that naturally follows is, "How do we do this?" What are the practical steps to achieving this state of readiness?

A Practical Guide: Throwing Off Darkness and Putting on Light

Thankfully, the Scriptures do not leave us wondering how to prepare. They give us a clear and achievable path. These steps are the strategic means by which we make our faith a lived reality, moving from theory to practice. The foundational command comes from St. Paul in our Second Reading. He gives us this powerful instruction: "*Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...*" The "*works of darkness*" are those things that hold us back from God. They are not always dramatic, but they are corrosive to the soul. They include:

- Things we do, say, and think that are wrongful and that we prefer to keep hidden.
- The indulging of lower and self-centered appetites.
- Actions rooted in "*reveling and drunkenness, illicit sex and licentiousness, quarreling and jealousy*."

In their place, we are called to put on the "*armor of light*." This is a life defined by positive, holy action. It means developing our relationships with God and with others based on caring and unconditional love. It means learning to find Jesus in every person and loving our neighbors as ourselves, just as Jesus loves us. If our daily lives are filled with this spirit of Jesus—in our words and in our actions—then we are prepared. The ultimate strategy is this: Concentrate on today, on the present hour, the present situation and respond to it in truth and love and the future will take care of itself. This mindset allows us to enter the season of Advent with a clear and focused purpose.

1. **Internal Renewal:** Reorganizing the Heart - Each week, we have an opportunity for a "personal Advent" as we prepare to meet Christ in the Eucharist. We can use this model for the entire season, taking time to clean and reorganize our hearts. This process involves five key steps:
 - a. **Recall:** The ways in which God has been present to us this past year.
 - b. **Reevaluate:** Our spiritual journey in the light of God's presence or our lack of it.
 - c. **Repent:** Of any actions that have caused us to stray from God.
 - d. **Reform:** Our self-understanding, remembering we are beloved children of God.
 - e. **Renew:** Our commitment to live in the complete freedom of God's love.
2. **External Actions:** Living Our Preparation - Our internal renewal must find expression in our external lives. Pious traditions like Advent wreaths and calendars are good, but only if we allow them to be "instruments of enlightenment and growing faith," not just "empty rituals" or sentimental activities. To make this year truly different, consider these three concrete actions:

- a. **Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation:** This is more than starting the season "fresh." It is an essential act of clearing away the debris of sin that obscures our vision, so that we will be able to *recognize* Christ when He comes.
- b. **Develop Accountable Relationships:** Find others with whom you can be honest and prayerful. We are not meant to make this pilgrimage alone. Spiritual friends keep us awake, focused, and on the path to the mountain of the Lord.
- c. **Build the Kingdom:** Look at the world around you and make a determined choice to improve it. This is not just a good deed; it is active practice for our role in the world to come. We are rehearsing for eternity by sharing the Light of Christ with others in a meaningful way.

When our internal renewal and our external actions align—when our daily lives are full of the spirit of Jesus—we learn to live fully in the present moment. We do not need to be anxious about the future, because the future will take care of itself.

An Invitation to an Encounter

This season of Advent is our annual opportunity to do exactly this—to clean and reorganize our hearts and priorities and push away what we have allowed to crowd out Jesus. We live in an in-between time, a time of waiting and preparation for the Lord's final coming, but also a time to give witness to Him now through our actions. It is a time to prepare our hearts for His arrival. I want to leave you with a few concrete challenges for this Advent season, ways to make this preparation real in your own life:

1. **Make Traditions Meaningful:** If you use an Advent Wreath or Calendar, don't let it be an empty ritual. Allow these traditions to be true "instruments of enlightenment and growing faith" that help you prepare room for Jesus in your heart.
2. **Start Fresh:** Begin this new liturgical year with a clean heart. Take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and allow God's mercy to renew you.
3. **Find Support:** We are not meant to walk this journey alone. Develop relationships with others for honest, prayerful, and mutual spiritual accountability.

This Advent is a unique, unrepeatable, and personal invitation from God. It is an opportunity for a deeper encounter with Him precisely because you are new, you are different, and you are here now. If we use this time to truly prepare—to throw off the works of darkness and live in the light—then we have no reason to fear. When that final call from Jesus comes, it will not be a moment of fear or surprise. He will say to us, "Come, my friend. I want to call you now; I want to share with you my life that never ends." And we, hearing His voice, will find that it is an encounter between "two old friends." We will be able to respond with joy and confidence: "Yes, Lord, I am ready. I have been waiting for you all this time."

Let us pray.

'Father in Heaven, ... increase our longing for Christ our Savior and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of His coming may find us rejoicing in His presence and welcoming the light of His truth.'

Amen.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Advent	A liturgical season that is a conscious reclaiming of time and attention for God, meant for slowing down, increased prayer, and deep reflection as a form of preparation for the coming of the Lord.
Armor of Light	A life defined by positive, holy action, which involves developing relationships with God and others based on caring and unconditional love, and finding Jesus in every person.
Deception of the Ordinary	The subtle spiritual danger that comes from being completely absorbed by the ordinary, everyday tasks of life, leading one to be unprepared for their final meeting with God.
Instruments of Enlightenment	Pious traditions, such as Advent wreaths and calendars, when they are used to foster a growing faith and prepare one's heart for Jesus, rather than being treated as empty rituals.
Internal Renewal	The process of preparing for Christ by cleaning and reorganizing one's heart through the five steps of recall, reevaluate, repent, reform, and renew.
Race to Christmas	The description of the modern cultural period between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, characterized as a frantic, chaotic time of great shopping deals and festive activities.
Spiritual Readiness	A positive and life-giving state of constant spiritual awareness, living fully in the present moment, and learning to recognize Jesus's presence in ordinary daily activities.
Two Races of the Season	The contrast between the culture's frantic and commercial "race to Christmas" and the Church's invitation to a purposeful, prayerful spiritual pilgrimage towards God.
Unavoidable Appointment	The single most certain appointment of life: the final meeting with God, whether at the end of one's individual life or at the end of time.
Works of Darkness	Things that are corrosive to the soul and hold one back from God, including wrongful actions, the indulging of self-centered appetites, reveling, drunkenness, illicit sex, licentiousness, quarreling, and jealousy.

Executive Summary

This briefing document synthesizes a theological reflection on the Christian season of Advent, presenting it as a deliberate spiritual counter-narrative to the secular, commercialized "race to Christmas." The central argument is that Advent offers a crucial opportunity for spiritual realignment and preparation for an encounter with God. This preparation is threefold: for the anniversary of Christ's first coming, for his final coming at the end of time, and for his daily presence in ordinary life.

The document addresses the common spiritual challenge of apathy arising from the repetitive nature of the liturgical calendar. It proposes that the key to revitalizing the season is the recognition that the individual is different from who they were in previous years; this personal "newness" creates a unique context for a fresh encounter with God. A primary spiritual danger identified is the "deception of the ordinary," where absorption in daily routines can obscure one's ultimate purpose and lead to unpreparedness for the most certain appointment of life—the final meeting with God.

True spiritual readiness is defined not as fearful anticipation of an unknown future, but as a state of constant, joyful awareness of God's presence in the present moment. To achieve this, the document outlines a practical framework based on St. Paul's call to "throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." This involves a dual approach: a five-step process of Internal Renewal (Recall, Reevaluate, Repent, Reform, Renew) and three concrete External Actions (receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, developing accountable spiritual relationships, and actively working to "build the Kingdom"). The ultimate goal of this preparation is to transform the final encounter with Christ from a moment of surprise or fear into a joyful meeting between "two old friends."

I. The Central Tension: Two Competing Visions of the Season

The document establishes a fundamental conflict between the cultural experience of the pre-Christmas season and the Church's intended meaning for Advent.

- The Secular "Race to Christmas": This is characterized as a "frantic period" and a "gauntlet between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day." It is defined by consumerism ("great shopping deals"), external decoration ("festive lights"), and a general sense of "controlled chaos."
- The Spiritual Invitation of Advent: In direct opposition, Advent is presented as a "powerful counter-invitation" and a "deliberate act of rebellion against the noise." Its purpose is to reclaim time and attention for God through intentional practices:
 - Slowing down
 - Increased prayer
 - Deep reflection on what is truly important
 - Spiritual realignment to achieve a state of readiness

II. Addressing Spiritual Apathy and the Power of Repetition

A core challenge acknowledged is the tendency for believers to "tune out" the message of Advent due to its annual recurrence, leading to feelings that the liturgical seasons are "unimpressive in their repetition."

- The Problem of Numbness: The repetition can cause the message to feel "stale," leading individuals to "zone out" while their minds drift to to-do lists.
- The Necessity of Repetition: This feeling is countered by an analogy: just as an athlete uses repetition to build physical strength, believers need "spiritual repetition with the fundamentals" to grow spiritually healthy. The text pointedly notes, "chances are pretty good that you're not a Saint, and you still need all the repetition you can get."
- The Key to Renewal: Personal Newness: The crucial insight for breaking this cycle of apathy is the recognition that the individual is not the same person they were a year ago.
- This "newness" may stem from new experiences, recovered friendships, grief, answered prayers, or even a growing indifference in faith. Because the individual has changed, this Advent presents a unique and unrepeatable opportunity to be open to God in new ways.

III. The Threefold Preparation for the "Unavoidable Appointment"

Advent is framed as a season of active preparation for the most certain event in human life: the final encounter with God. This preparation is not meant to inspire fear but is positioned as a "joyful journey towards God," as described by the prophet Isaiah's call to "go up to the mountain of the Lord." The preparation focuses on three distinct "comings" of Christ:

1. Past: The anniversary of his first coming into the world at Christmas.
2. Future: His final, certain coming at the end of an individual's life or the end of time.
3. Present: His continuous attempts to come to individuals in their everyday lives.

IV. The Spiritual Danger: The Deception of the Ordinary

The document identifies the most subtle and powerful spiritual danger not as overt evil, but as total absorption in the mundane tasks of life, which distracts from one's ultimate purpose.

- The Analogy of Noah: The Gospel notes that people in the Days of Noah were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." Their failure was not in performing these ordinary acts, but in being so "completely consumed by their daily routines that they were unprepared for the most important appointment of their lives." This is likened to modern distractions like endless scrolling and careerism.
- The Analogy of the Workers: The image of two men in a field and two women grinding meal—where one is taken and one is left—illustrates that external activity is not the deciding factor. The critical difference is internal disposition: "one heart is prepared and another is not."
- The Piercing Question: These analogies lead to a central self-examination: What preparations are being made for the future with God? The document warns that without this focus, all other success is meaningless.

V. A Practical Framework for Spiritual Readiness

True readiness is redefined not as anxiously trying to guess the future, but as a "positive and life-giving invitation to be 'spiritually awake.'" The core strategy is to live fully in the present moment, recognizing Jesus's presence in daily activities. "Concentrate on today, on the present hour, the present situation and respond to it in truth and love and the future will take care of itself." This state of readiness is achieved by following St. Paul's directive to "throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

Works of Darkness (To Be Thrown Off)	The Armor of Light (To Be Put On)
Wrongful actions, words, and thoughts kept hidden	A life defined by positive, holy action
Indulgence of lower and self-centered appetites	Developing relationships with God and others based on caring and unconditional love
Actions rooted in "reveling and drunkenness, illicit sex and licentiousness, quarreling and jealousy"	Finding Jesus in every person and loving neighbors as Jesus loves us

A. Internal Renewal: Reorganizing the Heart - A five-step process is proposed for internal preparation, modeled on the weekly preparation for receiving the Eucharist.

1. Recall: The ways God has been present over the past year.
2. Reevaluate: The spiritual journey in light of God's presence or the lack thereof.
3. Repent: Of actions that have led away from God.
4. Reform: One's self-understanding, remembering the identity as a beloved child of God.
5. Renew: The commitment to live in the freedom of God's love.

B. External Actions: Living Out the Preparation - Internal renewal must be expressed through concrete external actions. Pious traditions like Advent wreaths are valuable only when they are "instruments of enlightenment and growing faith" and not "empty rituals." Three specific actions are recommended to make the season transformative:

1. Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation: This act is essential for "clearing away the debris of sin that obscures our vision," enabling one to recognize Christ when He comes.
2. Develop Accountable Relationships: Finding spiritual friends for honest and prayerful support is crucial, because "We are not meant to make this pilgrimage alone."
3. Build the Kingdom: Make a determined choice to improve the world. This is described as "active practice for our role in the world to come" and "rehearsing for eternity."

VI. The Ultimate Goal: An Encounter Between Friends

The culmination of this diligent preparation is the transformation of the final meeting with Jesus. If one lives in a state of readiness, recognizing Christ in the present, the final call will not be a moment of fear.

- It will be an encounter between "two old friends."
- When Jesus calls, "Come, my friend. I want to call you now; I want to share with you my life that never ends," the prepared soul can respond with joy and confidence