

1st Week of Advent - Preparing for Christ

Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

Hi, I'm Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers. Let us begin with prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, our Father, we honor and bless you, and praise you, and glorify you on this day. Lord as we begin these series of reflections on Advent, as we prepare our minds and our hearts for the coming of your Son into the world, Lord, we ask you to remove all the distractions in our lives to be able to focus this time on you, to turn our hearts and our minds back toward you, so you can fill us with your love and your peace, so we can truly experience the joy of what this season is really all about. A season not just of giving physical gifts, but giving ourselves totally and completely to you, making a gift of our lives to you. Thank you, Lord, and we ask you to continue to bless our families as we prepare for the season of Christmas. We ask this through Christ, our Lord, Amen. In the name of Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Calling You to Repentance

Well, we begin this Advent season with a very familiar figure from the Gospels, the last of the prophets, John the Baptist, and John the Baptist was a man of God who the Jews admired and trusted as a person of holiness and integrity. He made people aware of their sinfulness, and called them to repentance.

Now, he wasn't judging them, he was simply reminding people that repentance doesn't mean just being sorry for the sins of the past. Repentance or metanoia in Greek means to turn your mind around. It means recognizing that we make mistakes, that we're human that sometimes we fall, and that the Lord needs to help raise us up again. It's a conversion, a radical transformation of our way of living, and thinking, and acting, and being. It's a redirecting of one's whole life.

Anticipation of Christ's Coming

Now, we need to prepare for the coming of Christ not just at Christmas, but every day of our lives. Saint Peter teaches us that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. Now, this is not to imply that the Lord is slow about His promise to return, but that He is patient with us, not wishing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He's giving us time to make that change, to turn our hearts and our minds back toward Him. In other words, if the end of the world seems slow in coming, it's because God is giving us time to turn back towards Him to redirect our lives.

Pray More Advent Retreat 2022 - Transcript

You know, the end of the world really shouldn't fill us with fear and trepidation, right? Because Jesus says, "No one knows the day or the hour." What we should be concerned about is the end of our world which can come at any time. So we always need to be prepared. And how do we do that? When we live a truly eucharistic faith, when we take what we receive in word and sacrament and the holy sacrifice of the mass, and then we bring that out into the world where we become Eucharist to the world, we make the path of our lives straight for the Lord's coming. So meeting the Lord should not fill us with fear and anxiety, but with joyful anticipation. The fruit of living the way that Jesus calls us to is a sense of interior peace that makes us ready to meet Him at any time.

The Prophet Isaiah speaks about filling in valleys and smoothing out mountains and hills, transforming cliffs into planes and ridges into valleys. I remember in grade school singing a song about that, "Every valley will be filled in. Every mountain and hill will be laid low. Winding ways made straight, and rough roads made smooth, and all mankind will see the salvation of God" you know, it brings back some wonderful Advent memories for me. You know, yeah.

So John the Baptist, his preaching helps to recall to mind all the obstacles that get in our way of having loving and life-giving intimacy with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is our role as Christians to be witnesses of God's love to the world, to be His face and His hands, and His voice to those who don't know Him. It's through what we say, and how we act, and how we live that others can truly see Jesus.

So how do I prepare for the coming of Christ into my life? Christ tells us that we have to stay awake. For we do not know on which day the Lord will come, that we must be prepared, for an hour that we do not expect, the Son of man will come. And looking forward to the excitement and joy of Christmas, to the coming of our Savior into the world, it is sometimes easy to forget that there will be a time most likely when we least expect it that we will meet the Lord face to face, and we must be ready.

How to be Prepared for Christ

So being prepared doesn't mean only making room for the Christmas tree in the living room but also preparing a space in the womb of our hearts, so that God's presence may lovingly dwell there. Being prepared means not only making sure that all the families and friends have received a gift, or a card, but also recognizing God's living presence in the world as we confront head on the challenges faced by our brothers and sisters who are struggling to make ends meet. Being prepared means not only making sure there's enough stuffing and gravy and ham and turkey and biscuits to go around, but also recognizing that sin pushes us into the darkness, and it is through sacrifice and self-denial that we see the light of Christ shining forth like the Sun from a simple stable in Bethlehem.

So as we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, we must recognize what a great privilege and grace it is to be living in this time to embrace salvation history. As the day of Christ's coming into the world approaches, let us prepare to receive our King, let us clean out the caverns and dark places

Pray More Advent Retreat 2022 - Transcript

of our lives so that Jesus may come and make His home with us. That means that we should attend the Sacrament of reconciliation. You know, often parishes will have reconciliation services, you know, just like they do at Lenten time, you know, prepare for Easter, there's often a reconciliation service to prepare us during this time of Advent as well, so please take advantage of that. And if your parish doesn't have something like that, or if you miss it, then go to either your parish, or to another parish, to the sacrament of reconciliation, especially if it's been a while since you've been to that Sacrament.

I know for me, I go every month. In fact, I have an alarm on my phone that reminds me, you know, at the same time every month, that it's time for the Sacrament of reconciliation. You know, because I think that helps us to better prepare as we live that eucharistic faith in the world, as we become Eucharist in the lives of others, as we witness to the power of God's love, we have more credibility when we're actually living what we say and what we believe. And the Sacrament of reconciliation, I think during this Advent season is the the key to metanoia, to turning our minds and our lives around, as we make room in our hearts, in our lives, and our homes to receive the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Focus on Christ this Season

So let us get past our preoccupation with the materiality of the holiday season. It's so easy to be distracted. I mean, as soon as, you know, in some stores, Labor Day, even before Halloween, they're putting out, you know, Labor Day, they're putting out Halloween decorations, and like the day after Halloween, they're putting out Thanksgiving and Christmas decorations. So, you know, there's almost no preparation anymore, right? We have to move from one thing to other quickly. No, let's take a deep breath, and let's slow down, and let's allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives.

Let us adequately prepare, right? It's just like working out, right? You have to stretch first before you work out. You don't just dive into it. You have to prepare your body for the exercise that it's about to experience. And the same thing is true with our souls and our lives. We have to adequately prepare for the coming of Christ. And so let's take advantage of these weeks of Advent, get past all the distractions, get, you know, maybe shut the TV off for a while, and spend a little more time in prayer, becoming more heart to heart with God. You know, adoration comes from the word adoratio which means mouth to mouth, right?

So let's find time for silence, so we can prepare ourselves for deeper intimacy with the Lord. Let's allow God's power and peace, God's love and life to draw us into a place where there's nothing standing between us and our ability to become the person who God created and caused each one of us to be.

Let us pray that this Advent may be a time of fruitful preparation, a time of giving ourselves over to God's will, and a time where, with God's help, we will prefer absolutely nothing to the love of Christ. Amen.