

Homily – 1st Sunday of Advent "B"
St. Monica's Parish: November 30, 2014

Isaiah 63:16-19, 64:2-7: Redeemer Lord, rupture the heavens. Come and save us, for you are our Father; we are the clay, you the potter.
Psalm 80: Lord, show us your face, and we shall be saved.
I Corinthians 1:3-9: We lack no spiritual gifts as we await the coming of God: grace and peace ... thanksgiving ...the faithfulness of God.
Mark 13:31-37: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away ... keep alert, stay awake!"

“What I say to you, I say to all: Keep awake!” (Now that I have your attention ...)

The Church begins a new liturgical year, with the season of Advent. Please note: the season of Advent, not the season of pre-Christmas sales! In fact, with the post-American Thanksgiving phenomenon of “Black Friday”, the ultimate shop-till-you-drop experience, gradually spreading its way across the Canadian border, it is difficult for us to maintain that sense of what Advent really is meant to be.

Advent is a pregnant time: a time of waiting, a time of joyful anticipation of the coming of Jesus. He came to us in the flesh, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, in the stable of Bethlehem; he will come again in glory, at the end of time, to judge the living and the dead; he comes each day into the lives of those with eyes to see him, faith to believe in him, hearts to welcome him, hands to serve him.

*In today's second reading, we hear St. Paul encouraging the people of Corinth to remain firm in hope, to trust in the faithfulness of God. After journeying in Paul's footsteps this past October, after visiting Corinth and so many of the places connected to Paul's life and mission, the communities he visited and to whom he wrote, it led me to wonder: if St. Paul were to write an Advent letter to **our** parish community, what might he want to say to us?*

From the Letter of Paul to the Church in Montreal:

Brothers and sisters who gather in the house of Monica: grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! I give thanks to my God for you, because God's grace is alive and at work in you, the gifts of so many united together for the mission of proclaiming the Good News, as entrusted to us by the Lord Jesus! As you enter into this Advent season, I invite you to renew your commitment to journey toward the Light that is Our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospel you have heard proclaimed today, He tells you that He will return at an hour you do not expect, so be alert and vigilant!

It is not easy to remain constantly watchful. In my day, we expected Christ to return while we yet lived. Two thousand years after Christ returned to the Father, here we are, still waiting! It is not easy to ignite the spark of hope, to keep faith alive, to tend the fires of love. But it is what the Lord is asking of you. Yes, even in the midst of the economic struggles and political uncertainty of these days, you must not lose hope. Even with the widening gap between rich and poor, longer line-ups at your food banks, revelations of corruption among your leaders, the vulnerability of the unborn, disabled, elderly, and terminally ill members of your community; even in the persecutions of your brothers and sisters in Iraq and Syria, in Pakistan and Nigeria, be bearers of light and beacons of hope!

Our brother Francis is at this moment on mission in Turkey, to give witness to religious freedom and human rights: the successor of Peter extending the hand of fellowship to the successor of Andrew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. He seeks also a new dialogue with the followers of Islam, to build bridges of peace and mutual understanding. Pray for the success of his mission! Extend the hand of friendship and healing wherever you can: in your family, your workplace, your neighbourhood.

Live and act as sons and daughters of light. Allow God to cast His light upon the shadows of your lives. Do not doubt his power to give you strength in the struggle against evil, courage in the face of death, perseverance and fidelity in your relationships, and joy in handing on this faith to a new generation of Christians. Rejoice in the families who come seeking baptism for their infants, who bring their children to learn about Jesus, to become his disciples, to put faith first in their lives. Help their parents and families to also know Jesus, to make their homes places of prayer and mutual love, to give thanks for all of God's blessings. Guide our youth and young adults as they discern their calling, their life's vocation.

Whatever darkness may threaten us, Jesus comes with his life and his light. He makes you children of the light. So be proud of the light within you and nurture it well. By that light, Christ is living and active in the world: so do not fear the darkness! Stand firm and remember: God so loved the world that He gave his only Son. This is the source of your hope, the light you bear to the world. Continue to feed the hungry, to shelter the homeless, to visit the sick, to welcome the stranger, to advocate for those with no voice, to give hope to the hopeless. Offer your financial and moral support to the members of your community who extend themselves in these works of mercy and solidarity.

This past week, your brothers and sisters in the Church which is in the United States celebrated their annual feast of Thanksgiving. I hear that many of you have imitated their practice of intense shopping on the day after: buying some things which you need, but many things which you do not! But do not neglect to first cultivate the true spirit of Thanksgiving: “an attitude of gratitude.”

This is your challenge, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Staying awake, being alert, means focusing on all your reasons for giving thanks, on all those things that bring you hope. Ponder them. Write them down. Tell your children. Share them with your friends. Post them on Facebook! May the God of peace keep you alert and awake, so that you may recognize Jesus wherever he appears in your life. If you want to welcome the child in the stable at Christmas, to be prepared for the coming of the Lord at the end of time – then learn to recognize and welcome him in your life, your world. Right here! Right now!

A Thanksgiving Prayer (James Martin, S.J.)

Thank you, God. I'm grateful for so many things. I'm grateful, God, for the gift of life. Without you I wouldn't be here. Without you nothing would be here - nothing would be at all.

I'm grateful for my parents, God. Even if they weren't perfect, they loved me the best they could, they worked hard to make sure that I had enough to eat, to wear, a safe place to sleep. I'll never know all that they did for me, but I can be grateful for the things that I know. Help me to express my gratitude in person. If my parents are now with you, help me to be thankful for their lives, and fill me with the hope of meeting them again in you, so I can say thanks again.

I'm grateful for my family, God. Yes, I know that all families are a little crazy, and mine is no exception. But I'm thankful that, even with the craziness, I'm part of a family that has made me the person I am. Help me to be a good family member, helping out when I can, phoning or

visiting or e-mailing when they're lonely, and keep my mouth shut when I should be listening.

I'm grateful for my friends, God. Even if I have only one good friend in my life, I'm still grateful. You love me through my friends in ways that I sometimes overlook: They give me advice, whether I want it or not; They listen to me complain, which I do too much, and they celebrate with me, even if things aren't going well for them. They help me to laugh. And they help me to laugh at myself. That alone is reason to be thankful. Help me to be a good friend in return.

I'm grateful for my job, God. It's not perfect, but at least I have a place to work and I am able to make ends meet. That's more than many people have. Even though the people I work with can drive me crazy, they are doing their best, too. Help me to do my work well, to give people the benefit of the doubt, to care for my co-workers, and not to take everything on the job so seriously. And help me remember that all work done freely and with a loving heart is worthy in your sight.

I'm grateful, God, for what I have that many people in this world don't have. And that's a long list. So I'm grateful for food. And clean water. And clothes. And heat in the winter and windows in the summer. I'm grateful that I can go to the doctor and be treated when I am ill. That's a lot more than most people have. Help me to be grateful, and help me to be generous to those who have less. That's an important way of thanking you.

Did I ever mention how much I appreciate all the things you created? The smell of lilacs in the summer? The color of autumn leaves against the deep blue sky? The way the frost makes crazy patterns on windows in the winter? The sight of the first daffodils in the springtime? I'm also grateful for the woods, and the sea, and the mountains, and sunsets

(they're really great!). And while I'm at it, for the taste of oranges, and hamburgers, and Chocolate.

Most of all, God, I'm grateful for you, for your presence in my life. You're everywhere, and if I remember to pay attention I can see your invitation to meet you in every moment of the day. I know that you are the one who turns my mind to thoughts of gratitude. When I'm tempted to focus only on my problems and worries and fears, I know that I'm being led away from you.

I'm not always as thankful as I should be, but today I am. Today I will try to be grateful all day, since you are generous all day to me, like you are every day.

Thank you, Lord!!