

Reflection for the 1st Sunday of Advent

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my Soul”

This is the response, from the Responsorial Psalm for First Sunday of Advent and this response truly does sum up what the Advent Season is all about. This Responsorial Psalm is taken from the Psalm 25 which is classified as a Psalm of Lament, which at first glance might seem to be a strange type of Psalm to include in the readings for the First Sunday of Advent, but the writer of the Psalm mixes ardent pleas with expressions of confidence in God who forgives and guides. As we enter a Season that is a time of joyful waiting and preparing for the celebration of the birth of Christ, we are reminded that we have a God who forgives and guides us. This is a Season of joyful preparation and knowing that we have a loving and forgiving God that is present in our mists to guide us in our journey of faith, we are more able to embrace this Advent Season and lift up our Souls to our Lord.

It is interesting to note that our Gospel reading this Sunday taking from the Gospel of Luke is not focused on the coming of Christ as an infant, but rather it is focused on the second coming of Christ and the fact that redemption is at hand. So, we start the Advent Season with a focus on the second coming of Christ. Then on the Second Sunday of Advent the Gospel reading focuses not on the second coming of Christ, nor on His birth, but rather on St. John the Baptist informing the world that the Messiah is at hand. The Third Sunday of Advent’s Gospel reading informs us that the crowds coming to John the Baptist were wondering if he was the Messiah, John the Baptist answers this question by stating *“I am baptizing you with water but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”* It is finally on the Fourth Sunday of Advent that we hear of events that happen before the birth of the Messiah, with the Gospel reading relating what happens when Mary visits Elizabeth.

The four weeks of the Advent Season, takes us on a journey of joyful preparation. The Sunday Gospel Readings for this Season clearly show us that this is a Season of movement that has a two-fold message of preparation. The start of the Advent Season is focused on the second coming of Christ and the end of the Season is focused on the first coming of Christ. What binds this two-fold message together is the last of the Prophets, the bridge between the old and the new covenant, St. John the Baptist. It is in the second and third weeks of the Advent Season that St. John the Baptist has a very important role in the readings. It is in these two weeks that St. John the Baptist provides the bridge between the messages first and second coming of Christ.

The main symbol of the Advent Season the Advent Wreath reminds us that this Season is one of waiting and preparing. It is a time of opening our hearts and souls to our God who has created us. In the Catholic Church the color of the Advent candles is violet and rose. In weeks one, two and four a violet candle is light, and in week three the rose candle is light. These colors correspond with the colors of the liturgical vestments for the Sundays of Advent. In the Western church, Violet is the historic liturgical color for three of the four Sundays of Advent, it is the traditional color for penance and renewal. Rose is the color for the Third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday coming from the Latin word meaning “to rejoice”, this Sunday marks the halfway point in this season of preparation, and it is a time to rejoice as we continue in a season of renewal and preparation. Each week as we light another candle of the Advent Wreath, we are reminded of the four week long Season in which we prepare for Christmas.

The fact that there is such a strong focus on each week in the Season of Advent building on the next week, does make this Season different from the other Seasons of the Liturgical Year. This Season is a true journey where each step we take builds on the next step. So, as we start this journey may we make sure that our first step in the Advent Season lands on a solid foundation, so may we all, lift up our souls, as we enter into this Advent Season preparing for the celebration of Christmas, and trust in our loving and forgiving God to guide us this day and every day.