

HOMILY

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

A very dear friend of mine, Sr. Mary Finn, went home to the Lord this past year; and I have been thinking about her recently. I met her when I went to the seminary and she lived there, so I saw her almost every day for six years. She was a tremendous spiritual inspiration and role model for me. Her favorite saying was: “Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus,” and I think that is exactly what she did. She had a tremendous number of great stories, and I want to share one with you today. One day she was getting gas at a gas station right near the seminary at Claremont and Linwood, which is not the best neighborhood. A man came up to her and said: “I need to get to work. If I do not go, I will not get paid and I may lose my job. Will you drive me there?” She said: “No, I have to teach a class at the seminary right now, but you can take my car, but you have to bring it back when you are finished working.” Then she handed him her car keys. What do you think happened? He brought the car back later that day. Sr. Mary once said to me: “People sometimes think I am just a crazy old lady, but I know exactly what I am doing.” How many people here think you would turn your car keys over to a total stranger like Sr. Mary did? How many of you think that Jesus would have done what Sr. Mary did?

In the Gospel Reading today, we hear that all kinds of terrible things will happen before the end of the world that will be frightening; and some people will even die of fright. Jesus says: “But when these signs happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” Sometimes terrible things happen in our lives that lead us to change the way we live our lives. It can be an opportunity to change our lives in a way that brings us closer to Jesus. For almost two years we have been living through a pandemic, and that has been frightening. Maybe we should be telling ourselves: “But when these signs happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” As we begin to put our lives together as we move out of the pandemic, let us be mindful about putting our lives back together in a way that brings us closer to Jesus.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Advent is not about what was, it is about what can be. Advent is a time for a new start. In moving forward, I think we need to take Sr. Mary’s advice and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Our theme for Advent this year is “*Jesus ... the way, the truth and the life.*” Jesus is the way. Jesus came to the earth in a human body 2,000 years

ago. He gave us an example of how to live. He inspired the Gospel writers to provide a written record of how he lived so that we could still follow his example 2,000 years later. I can almost hear Jesus saying today: "It is all right there. I am the way. You just have to follow me."

I want to suggest a few things that you can do this Advent to come out of the pandemic in a way that brings you closer to Jesus so that you can follow him. I am going to suggest that you read a section of the Gospels every day. I suggest that you start with the Gospel of Luke, because we are in Cycle C for Mass this year and we are going to focus upon the Gospel of Luke. Bibles are divided into short sections. Start at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke and read one little section per day and then ask yourself: "How does this apply to my life today?" That is what I did with the Gospel Reading today. I could have said: "Well that just applies to the end of the world, so it does not apply to my life today." However, I think that it applies to our lives coming out of any crisis, including the pandemic. This is not about what Scripture Scholars would say about the reading, it is about how it speaks to you. Another thing that I am going to suggest you do is to commit yourself to coming to Mass every weekend during Advent and Christmas. If you do not feel comfortable coming to Mass in person, watch the St. Edith streaming and be part of our community. We can get so busy at this time of the year that sometimes a whole week passes without thinking of Jesus, and it is easy to find something else to take care of on the weekend. If you can commit to coming to Mass, at least you will be spending one hour thinking about Jesus. Ask yourself how you did last week and make a plan for the coming week. The third thing I am going to suggest is that you ask yourself if there is someone in your life that you need to reach out to. You will be connecting with friends and relatives during the Christmas Season. Don't just wait for Christmas to come and then feel awkward when you meet. Prepare now and maybe you can begin to repair the relationship now. We should not be wandering around aimlessly during Advent. Jesus is the way. Follow him.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim