

HOMILY ~ FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

NOVEMBER 30 / DECEMBER 1, 2024

Happy New Year everybody! Today is New Year's Day for the Church, the start of a new liturgical year, so we should be celebrating. The Gospel Reading looks a little depressing for the New Year. It is about the end times again today. Actually, it is good news. Jesus tells us, *"But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand."* It is the good news of our faith as followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago for the forgiveness of the sins we had not even committed yet. Jesus has saved us.

Advent is a time of new beginnings. Our theme for Advent this year is **"Make Personal Connections."** During Advent, we are preparing for Christmas and for the second coming of Jesus Christ. These preparations will be greatly helped by making connections that are more personal. During COVID, we were driven into isolation. We have dealt with the physical effects of COVID, but we are still dealing with the psychological effects. One of the things that happened during COVID is that many of us went to social media to replace personal connections, and many of us have not scaled that back. I am going to suggest that you get totally off social media for Advent. I am going to ask you to think about it at least. If you cannot cut it out completely, at least drastically limit it. You will have much more time to develop personal connections, and your personal connections will be better.

A recent Pew Research Center survey reports that 8% of Americans report having zero close friends. We need close friends. With all of the divisiveness, negativity and hatred in the world, I guess it is not surprising that close friendships have decreased. We have to do something about this. Instead of saying things should not be like this; we have to start saying, *I should not be like this* and then start doing something about it. Let us remember the things that we value: love, beauty, goodness, kindness, civility and integrity. This is what most of us value.

Many times the political group we belong to have labeled the people outside of this group as the evil others. We all need a social group where we feel we belong. Sometimes being part of this political group means hating those outside of the group, which may be the only social group that we have. So we hate. We are blessed as Catholics because we have a Church group where we can potentially belong, but many do not have that. We hear in the Second Reading, *"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all."* Not just for the people in your bubble, but for all. If we limit our connections with people to people in our bubble, we are severely limiting our personal connections. We need to be open to listening to people with different opinions, not to change their mind, but to understand where they are coming from. You will probably find that your opinions are closer than you think, and you may even find that you agree with each other on some things. That is how we can increase our personal connections. I found this quote from Fred Rogers this week, and I want to share it with you. This is what he said, *"I believe that appreciation is a holy thing. When we look for what is best in the person we happen to be with at the moment, we are doing what God does. In loving and appreciating our neighbor, we are participating in something truly sacred."* So stay off social media, make personal connections instead and appreciate the people you happen to be with in the moment. On social media, we sometimes post terrible things that we would never say to someone in person.

By staying off social media, we can make a new commitment to the truth. In some ways, truth has become whatever we think it is. There are some things that are facts, and we need to try and uncover the truth. There is a lot of misinformation on social media. The more you look at the misinformation, the more misinformation is fed to you. It may look like the truth, but it is not.

So, what do you think? No social media during Advent. **Make Personal Connections** instead, commit to finding truth. This is a good way to prepare for Christmas and the second coming of Jesus.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim