

HOMILY for 1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT – Year A

This Sunday's Readings talk about the importance of preparing for the coming of our Lord Jesus. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this new cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Mike had stopped off at a small-town tavern & made his way to the bar when there was a commotion outside. A man at the door shouted, "Run for your lives! Big Jake's coming!" As everyone scattered, an enormous man burst through the door, threw tables & chairs aside & strode up to the bar. "Gimme a drink!" he ordered.

Left alone at the bar, Mike quickly handed over a bottle of whiskey. The huge man downed it in one gulp, then ate the bottle. Paralyzed with fear, Mike stammered, "Can I g-get you another one, sir?"

"Nope, I gotta go," grunted the giant. "Didn't you hear? Big Jake's coming!"

Anyway, "Big Jake's coming! Run for your lives!" Or, let me revise it for our current spiritual situation & say, "Big Jesus's coming! Be watchful & be prepared!" As we've just heard in the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent, Jesus warned His disciples that His second coming would be like what happened in Noah's time. Here's what He said, "The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time. In the days before the flood, people were eating & drinking, marrying & being married right up to the day Noah entered the ark. They were totally unconcerned until the flood came & destroyed them." The Lord continued, "...Therefore, stay awake! You cannot know the day your Lord is coming... You must be prepared. For the Son of Man is coming at the time you least expect." So, Jesus warned us His disciples to be watchful & prepared for His Second Coming. It could be the end of our lives, or the end of the world. He used the epic flood that happened in Noah's time to warn us about the importance of preparing for something unexpected like the Judgment Day, or the Second Coming of Jesus. If we're prepared like Noah & his family were, we'll be ready for that day & end up being saved. Otherwise, we'll be caught off-guard like the public back then & face terrible consequences on that day.

We all remember well COVID-19 that caught the whole world by surprise & delivered Judgment-Day-like consequences to everyone – young & old alike. Most people were not prepared for it & thought that it might be the end of the world as millions of people were contracted with that deadly virus & died without any warning. The whole world was literally stopped in its track as all the daily wheeling and dealing was disrupted & suspended indefinitely. Some believers thought that COVID-19 was the wake-up call to our world from above to let it know who is really in charge. Human beings have bragged about its advancement in science & technology in modern time; then God put out the simple COVID virus & turned the whole world upside down. Even the smartest scientists were baffled by the infection rate of the virus & its scale of destruction. If we don't look back on COVID-19 as one of the warning signs for us to live according to Jesus' Commandments & preparing well for His Second Coming, it might be too late for us to turn our lives around & face His judgement on that day. That is why St. Paul gives us this warning in this Sunday's Second Reading, "You know the time in which we are living. It is now the hour for you to wake up from sleep, for our salvation is closer than when we first accepted the faith... Let us cast off deeds of darkness & put on the armor of light. Let us live honorably as in day light; not in carousing & drunkenness, not in sexual excess & lust, not in quarreling & jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ & make no provision for

desires of the flesh.” So, we are called to turn away from deeds of darkness & evil desires. Instead, we are encouraged to live honorably & await for the hour of our salvation & the Second Coming of Jesus.

The Second Coming of Jesus will not only bring us our long-awaited salvation but also establish a whole new world of peace & justice. Here’s how prophet Isaiah envisions & shares with us about that world in this Sunday’s Second Reading as following, “...All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come & say: ‘Come, let us climb the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may instruct us in His ways, & we may walk in His paths.’...He shall judge between the nations, & impose terms on many peoples.” The prophet continues, “...They shall beat their swords into plowshares & their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” I don’t know about you, but I love that Scripture passage & look forward to hearing it every Advent. Prophet Isaiah invites us to dream for a world where deadly weapons like swords & spears will be turned into useful tools for peaceful purposes of daily living. Perhaps we could add to it & pray that all the guns & missiles of our current world would be transformed into windmills and solar panels that would help us grow more crops to feed the hungry and reduce the pollution of our beautiful Creation.

As someone who survived the Viet Nam War & escaped to this peaceful land of America, I dream about & pray for that world of the First Reading all the time. That is why I was surprised to see one of the Veterans at Grand Rapids Home for Veterans offered me an M-16 rifle during one of my visits there at COVID time because he thought that the world had become chaotic & unsafe for me. I turned down his offering gently & told him that I’d be alright with my slingshot & a couple of martial arts moves. Or, recently at a Deanery meeting, the Diocese of Grand Rapids has finally taken violent shootings at worship places seriously, especially after that shooting incident at a Catholic Church in Minneapolis, MN & begun to discuss safety measures at its local churches. However, it was shocking for me to see some priests want the Security Guards at the Cathedral to be armed with deadly weapons without considering its harmful consequences.

My friends, we need to dream together & pray for a world of peace & love by turning deadly weapons into useful tools for peaceful purposes of daily living, by switching the hateful language & violent political rhetoric into reconciling language & peaceful compromises. We must invite peoples of various cultures, ethnicities, languages, backgrounds, & viewpoints to climb the Lord’s mountain & walk together in His path. That is the only way we could get ourselves out of the current cycle of hate & violence. That is the last resort for our current world to turn itself from the culture of death to the culture of life. That is what we Christians dream about this Advent & pray for this Christmas. That is the Christmas wish that we would like Jesus to bring to our world this magical season.

My dear brothers & sisters, what is it that you would like to dream about this Advent & pray for this Christmas? Are you still getting stuck with the old habits & involved with the politics of hate & violence? If you are, Jesus wants you to wake up from your sleep & be prepared for His Second Coming by embracing a life of peace & love. He wants us to practice His Commandments of love & turn all the deadly weapons into useful tools for peaceful purposes of daily living. Once we are able to do that, we’ll begin to build up a new world of peace & justice to welcome the coming of our Lord.