

Homily for the 1st Sunday of Advent

I've come to the conclusion that no matter how early the Christmas shopping season starts each year, there will always be last minute shoppers. I would add along to that: no matter how much you want to get your Christmas cards out early this year, they'll probably go out later than you wanted. And maybe, just maybe, I would even add: no matter how much you want to put up those outdoor lights in a nice, orderly fashion outside, they'll probably go up a lot more haphazardly than you wanted, because you just ran out of time. Yes, this is a busy time of year, with lots of preparations going on. But even more than busyness, I think a growing hallmark of this season is procrastination.

A few years back, there was an article in *USA Today* citing a giant study by an industrial psychologist on procrastination in the workplace. Ironically, it took 10 years of research to complete this project that was only supposed to take five years! Well anyway, the researcher found that back in 1978, roughly five percent of Americans considered themselves "chronic procrastinators"; whereas presently, more than 25% of adults now admit to frequently procrastinating. He said that men are slightly more likely to procrastinate than women, and the young are more likely to do so than the elderly. In fact, three out of four college students consider themselves procrastinators, the psychologist said. And having worked with college students at Bloomsburg University before coming here to IHM, I can confirm this research!

Procrastination is something that has become so commonplace – think about how late we tend to sign up or register for various things! But upon really thinking about it, it seems to me like procrastination gets in the way of more than just our preparations of holiday shopping and Christmas card writing and even house decorating. It seems to me that procrastination even more gets in the way of our spiritual preparations.

What do I mean? Well, every year around this time we hear how Advent is the start of a new Church liturgical year. We hear that Advent is a time of preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth. And we hear that we have more or less four weeks to get ready for Christmas. On this, the 1st Sunday of Advent, hopefully such messages genuinely inspire us to take this whole preparation theme seriously. But, then what often happens? We realize we accidentally bought the wrong size flannel shirt for grandpa, and so we have to make time to return it. We realize we didn't send a Christmas card to great aunt Leona in Minneapolis. And we realize that we definitely don't have enough light sets to cover the same amount of shrubs as last year. In the meantime, the 2nd and 3rd Sundays of Advent pass us by. And before we know it, it's just days before Christmas, and we wonder to ourselves, where did those four weeks go?

So, realizing all that's probably going to happen in one way, shape, or form anyway, maybe we can make a plan now to truly prepare our hearts and souls more this Advent season for the celebration of Christ's first coming. I would suggest taking some extra personal prayer time each day –maybe first thing in the morning or right before going to bed – and at least reading the daily Advent reflections in the booklets we're making available to you. Or maybe you'd like to find an online devotion. All these are helps to get us spiritually ready to celebrate the true reason for the season.

But what about Jesus' second coming? You know, this first part of the Advent season is meant to help us focus on what we need to do to get ready for the return of Christ at the end of time. When we think about Jesus' first coming, when He was born on Christmas, we find comfort and peace in that silent, holy night. But, when we think about Jesus' second coming at the end of time, that seems a little more remote, doesn't it? Maybe we tend to think, "Well Jesus hasn't come back in 2,000 years, so He's probably not going to return in my life time either!" Maybe we think Jesus is procrastinating, and so we procrastinate in focusing on what we would need to do to get ourselves ready for such an occasion as meeting our Maker face to face. That occasion will come for every single one of us – be it at the moment of our death or when the Lord does return in almighty glory.

So how do we prepare for that reality? Well, all that we do as Catholics – prayer, Scripture reading, the Sacraments, our personal relationship with Jesus – it’s all meant to prepare us for that ultimate moment by helping us become more like Christ – as St. Paul puts it in our 2nd reading today, “to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father”. But, if I could suggest just one thing in particular to help us in this preparation, it would be to seek out the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Of course Confession is available every Saturday from 4 to 4:45pm and Sunday from 7:30 to 8 am. But also during Advent, our parish – and every parish in our area – will be having a special Penance Service where numerous priests will be available to hear confessions after a short introductory prayer service. While it’s true that God can forgive sins anyway He wants to, the way He has given to His Church to know beyond the shadow of a doubt that our sins are forgiven is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And remember Jesus words in the Gospel today – “be vigilant at all times” and do not let “that day catch you by surprise like a trap”! Please be careful NOT to procrastinate about going to Confession! After all, we now have less than four weeks until Christmas, and perhaps even less until the Lord Jesus returns in glory. God bless you.