ADVENT 1C

The Season of Advent has more than one focus in the life of the Church.

The more immediate one is the preparation for the Christmas Season, as we join our ancestors in faith

in that spirit of watching and waiting for the coming of the long awaited Messiah.

So it is similar to Lent, in that its a time of preparation for the coming season of joy,

But its focus is a little different from Lent.

It’s a time that the Church gives us to strengthen that sense of watchfulness,

so that the celebration of Christmas might have its fullest impact in our lives.

The other focus of Advent is to look ahead to the return of Christ in glory, the fulfillment of the Kingdom.

Our readings during the early part of this season focus a little more on His return in the future,

then, as we draw closer to Christmas, the focus turns more to those days leading up to His birth.

Actually, our readings today give us a little bit of each.

Our first reading from Jeremiah points to His coming at Bethlehem. “The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land.”

A “shoot” refers to a young tree or sapling, as in the line from Isaiah that we also hear during Advent, “a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse” (Jesse is King David’s father). The point of both Isaiah and Jeremiah is the same: The coming Messiah would be a fulfillment of the line of David, a return to glory for God’s people.

But Jesus would be a different kind of King, an eternal King who brings victory and peace that last forever.

Our reading from 1st Thessalonians points to the future coming of Christ. Paul encourages Christians to prepare themselves for “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.”

His focus, like that of Jesus, was love: “Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in

love for one another and for all, just as we have for you.”

Faith, Hope and Love are called the Theological Virtues, meaning that they originate in God.

They are gifts we receive from God, not just something we do on our own.

We grow in them by remaining close to God.

But its not just a passive acceptance of these gifts. It’s a decisive openness. A choice to remain attentive.

An intentional option for wherever God is leading us, for whatever seed God wants to plant in our lives.

Paul says, “may the LORD make you increase and abound in love...”. The Lord, not us.

As always, its God’s work in us to which we respond.

The Gospel today also refers to the future coming of Christ. Jesus talks of signs in the sky and in the seas,

of people being frightened, and the heavens being shaken as the Son of Man comes in power and glory.

Then He says, “But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” In other words, ‘don’t run and hide. If we with Me, there’s nothing to fear.’

He does give one caution, though. And it relates in particular to this Season of Advent I think. He says,

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from...the anxieties of daily life...”.

It’s sad that the holiday season is a cause of stress and anxiety for many people.

I know that there are many reasons for this, but let’s try to make this year different.

The world around us is already rushing into Christmas, but the Church calls us to be patient and wait.

Let’s try to join our ancestors in faith, in that sense of anticipation and longing.

How can we resist the hustle and bustle that’s all around us?

How can we make the most of the Advent season this year?