



Contributed by Father Paul Voisin, C.R.

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FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
November 28, 2021

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Some years ago there was a news story about a house fire in which, unfortunately, five family members perished. It was found out that the owner of the building had intended to put in smoke detectors, but he never got around to it. In our human condition, we can tend to be procrastinators. We keep putting off to tomorrow what we should do today, sometimes—as in this story—with tragic results. But in daily family life, we can also be guilty of procrastination—the spouses who say that “one day” they will have that time together that they have always longed for, or the parents who say they must find more time to spend with their children, or children (especially with their aging parents) who say that they must get around to see Mom and Dad more often. Unfortunately, all too often, the time flies by and before we know it the people are either gone from our house, or gone from our world.

The same procrastination can happen in our spiritual lives. This shows itself in people who think/believe/say that we will dedicate more of our time to prayer, to Mass, and participating in the life of the Church, when we retire. Or, that after this project at work, or this exam at school, we will share in some charitable program at the parish. Once again, the time flies by and, before we know it, the moments of grace that could have been ours are gone, and we discover that we cannot do “catch up” in a spiritual life that requires daily attention, and not an “all at once” effort.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

I am sure that procrastination is not new to any of us, in varying degrees. Advent is a wake-up call to no longer procrastinate, but to act, to prepare ourselves spiritually for the celebration of the birth of the Saviour. This is a four-week “growth plan, not a December 24th “growth plan”. We grow slowly and regularly—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—and not in one day. Each day in Advent is an opportunity to draw closer to Christ, whose birth approaches. If we truly want Jesus to be Emmanuel, “God-with-us,” we need to be WITH Him. Just as a friendship grows day-by-day, so too our life with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a day-by-day invitation which, in our human condition (= sin) we can too often put off, ignore or reject.

How do my daily activities reflect what is important to me (my priorities, my passion)?
How have I procrastinated in my life with God?
When did that change?

TABLE OF THE WORD

When I was a student in University I sometimes found myself in the situation where I had to pull an “all-nighter”. Either because of a heavy workload, poor time management, or laziness, I found myself under the gun at the last minute and having to spend the whole night finishing a project or essay. I am sure that this never happened to many of you, nor does this continue in our present time (ha, ha).

This year, Advent gives us twenty-eight days to prepare for the celebration of the birth of the Saviour. These could be twenty-eight days of grace, or they could be twenty-eight days of procrastination in our spiritual life, waiting to “find the time,” or “have a break,” or “feel like it”. God is patient in waiting, far more than most of us are, however, in the meantime we are missing out, and others are missing out, because we are procrastinating and not taking seriously what God has invited us to do—to grow in our life with Him as we prepare for the celebration of the birth of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. God is not asking for an “all-nighter,” or a whole day, but some time each day, especially each Sunday as the readings from Sacred Scripture move our hearts to echo the “Yes” of Mary, and the courage of John the Baptist.

Penitential Rite:

Sloth is one of the seven deadly sins. Sloth is described in the dictionary as “disinclination to action or labour ... spiritual apathy and inactivity”. We are capable of sloth in all areas of our lives – personal, spiritual, professional. In his “Purgatorio,” Dante portrayed sloth as the “failure to love God with all one’s heart, all one’s mind and all one’s soul,” and the penance for sloth as running continuously at top speed!

As we begin this Advent season, this season of grace, let us be resolute in not falling into this sin, but taking advantage of each day in our journey to December 25.

Lord Jesus, you call us into life with you,

Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, with loving patience you await our response,

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, forgive us our tardiness and lack of love,

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray:

“Lord, thank you for all you do.
Thank you for providing me with everything I need in my life.
I am grateful for my friends, my family, my life.
Today, though, I need your help.
I have this Advent season before me.
I keep finding other things to do instead of facing the task at hand.
I know, Lord, that you ask us not to procrastinate.
I know that I should just hunker down and do this,
but I need your help to give me a little push, a little motivation.
Lord, you are my strength and my provider.

Whether you are providing me with a little inspiration, a person to give me a push,
or just a seed of an idea, I am coming to you for help.
I am coming to you to not put off what needs to be done,
but for me to gain some of the strength I know only comes from you.
You are the one who provides.
And, Lord, I ask that once I get started in Advent,
you help me remain focused.
I know how easily I can be distracted by other things.
The phone ringing. The television changing to a show I love.
The music blaring over a radio.
Even the sunshine outside my window can be a distraction.
Lord, help me get into this moment of grace
and just deal with what's in front of me.
Help me remain completely and utterly focused.
Take the temptations away from me so that my mind and heart
become wrapped around what needs to be done.
Amen.”
(adapted from an Anonymous prayer)

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil 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. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: “The Lord our justice.”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING 1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2

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, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen. Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God and as you are conducting yourselves you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

The Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

GOSPEL Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

COMMENTARY:

In the First Reading, God reveals that He will “fulfill the promise he made to the House of Israel and Judah”. He will raise up a Saviour, of the House of David, and His divine justice will be revealed. We believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

In the Second Reading St. Paul encourages the people to live fully the life of Christ. They are “to conduct themselves to please God,” keeping in mind the “instructions” given to them. This is calling them to be alert and aware of God’s working in and among them, and to be in tune with God’s ways. If they are not “vigilant,” they will not recognize His call, and not respond, and thus not advance in their life of grace with God.

The gospel for this First Sunday of Advent, in which the Lord Jesus tells us to “be vigilant at all times,” made me think about this bad habit of procrastination. Advent is a unique time of the liturgical year. Although the colour of the vestments is the same as the Lenten season, the spirit of the season is very different. Whereas Lent is a time of conversion and returning to the Lord, Advent is a time of waiting, watching, and being alert for the celebration of the first coming of the Lord Jesus at His birth. The gospel reading for this Sunday continues the theme of the last few weeks (I call them the “doom and gloom” readings), filled with destruction and disaster. Yet, there is always a note of hope: Jesus saying, “Stand erect and raise your heads. ... Beware ... Be vigilant.” He not only tells us to be prepared, but reminds us that He is with us in order to prepare ourselves for His coming. Jesus has been victorious over sin and death—by his suffering, death and resurrection—and we share in that life through our baptism.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. “I will fulfil the promise” Jeremiah 33:14-16

God is loving and merciful. God is powerful and majestic. Yet, He is “limited” if we are not cooperating with His grace, believing His truth, and sharing His love. God continually made promises to His Chosen People, and he fulfilled that promise in His only-begotten Son.

- a) As God “raised up David,” how am I aware that He has “raised up” me?
- b) How am I helping to fulfil God’s promise?

2. “So as to strengthen your hearts” 1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2

God is loving and merciful. God is powerful and majestic. Yet, He is “limited” if we are not cooperating with His grace, believing His truth, and sharing His love (repeated, from above, on purpose). Our procrastination, neglect, and even opposition, weaken our heart, weaken our resolve, and weaken the testimony of life that God asks of us through His Son, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our response cannot be “accidental” but must be intentional and 100%.

- a) How has my heart been “strengthened” by the Lord?
- b) What was my heart like before it was “strengthened”?
- c) How do I conduct myself in a way that shows I am “blameless in holiness,” and seeking to “abound in love”?

3. “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy” Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

My whole purpose in using procrastination in relation to these readings is that we will be missing out if we “become drowsy” and miss the opportunities for grace that are ours during the Advent season if we do not take this time seriously. The time is now – 2021 – and the time is urgently in need of a strong and joyful response of the followers of Jesus.

- a) How has the pandemic made me “drowsy” in my spiritual life?
- b) What are concrete spiritual activities I want to embrace during Advent that will help me to “stand erect and raise my head”?
- c) How will I help others to overcome procrastination during this time of spiritual preparation for the celebration of the birth of the Saviour?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. Word of the Week: “Be vigilant at all times”

2. Suggestions for the Week:

I can imagine that all of us have had the experience of being drowsy and almost falling asleep during a class, during a meeting, or even in a conversation. Our spiritual drowsiness is also real, and Advent is a time to wake up, be alert, and be “vigilant,” so that we recognize and respond to the many moments of grace that are ours during Advent. Matthew Kelly, in his book *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, wrote about prayer, study, generosity and evangelization. In the chapters on prayer and study, he suggests beginning a regimen of both spiritual activities with just ten minutes a day, and slowly (but surely) building up to a greater amount of time spent in prayer and in spiritual reading/study. We all have experienced how our appetite increases once we dedicate ourselves to these two means of grace, of inspiration, and of ministry to others. Let this be one way, during the Advent season, that we remain “vigilant,” and find ourselves spiritually renewed as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Let Him be reborn in us through our faithfulness and persistence, the opposite of procrastination.

3. Intercessions:

In the midst of material and social preparation for the Christmas season, God calls us to not be neglectful of our spiritual preparation, remembering that “Jesus is the reason for the season”.

Help us to focus on what is truly important during the Advent season, and to “seize the moment” and share more fully in your life. And, so we pray ... **Come, Lord Jesus**

Help us to overcome our procrastination and laziness in relation to our spiritual life and our lives as disciples and stewards. And, so we pray ... **Come, Lord Jesus**

Make this Advent season one of renewal in each of us, in our families, among our friends, in our school or workplace, and in our parish community. And, so we pray ... **Come, Lord Jesus**

Be with us, Lord, when we become drowsy in this journey of twenty-eight days. Revive and renew us in your love and truth. And, so we pray ... **Come, Lord Jesus**

As the light of our Advent wreath grows, may your light grow in us, and illuminate and enlighten others. And, so we pray ... **Come, Lord Jesus**

Let us pray:
(continuing from previous Prayer)

“Lord, I ask for the Holy Spirit to speak to me,
whispering in my ear so that I set reasonable timelines this Advent.
I ask that I get things done long before the last minute
so I can focus on making this Advent the best it can be.
Lord, I know that I can accomplish this task,
but I know it will go so much better with you lifting me up and guiding me through it.
I know I can do all things through you,
so I come to you to help me through this desire to keep putting things off.
I ask for strength and guidance.
As always, to know you are providing for me,
it gives me motivation and empowers me.
You are my everything.
Amen.”

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, OUR FATHER...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).